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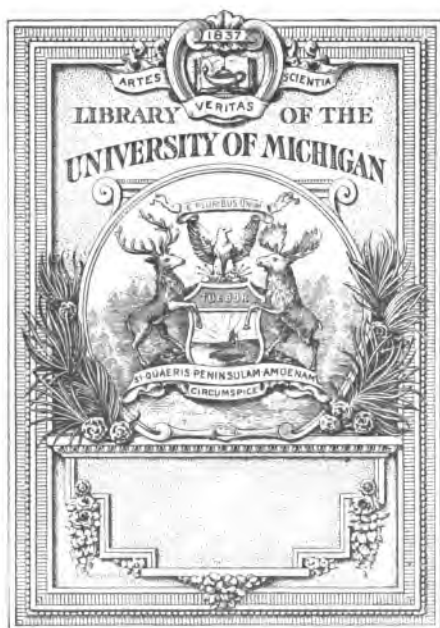
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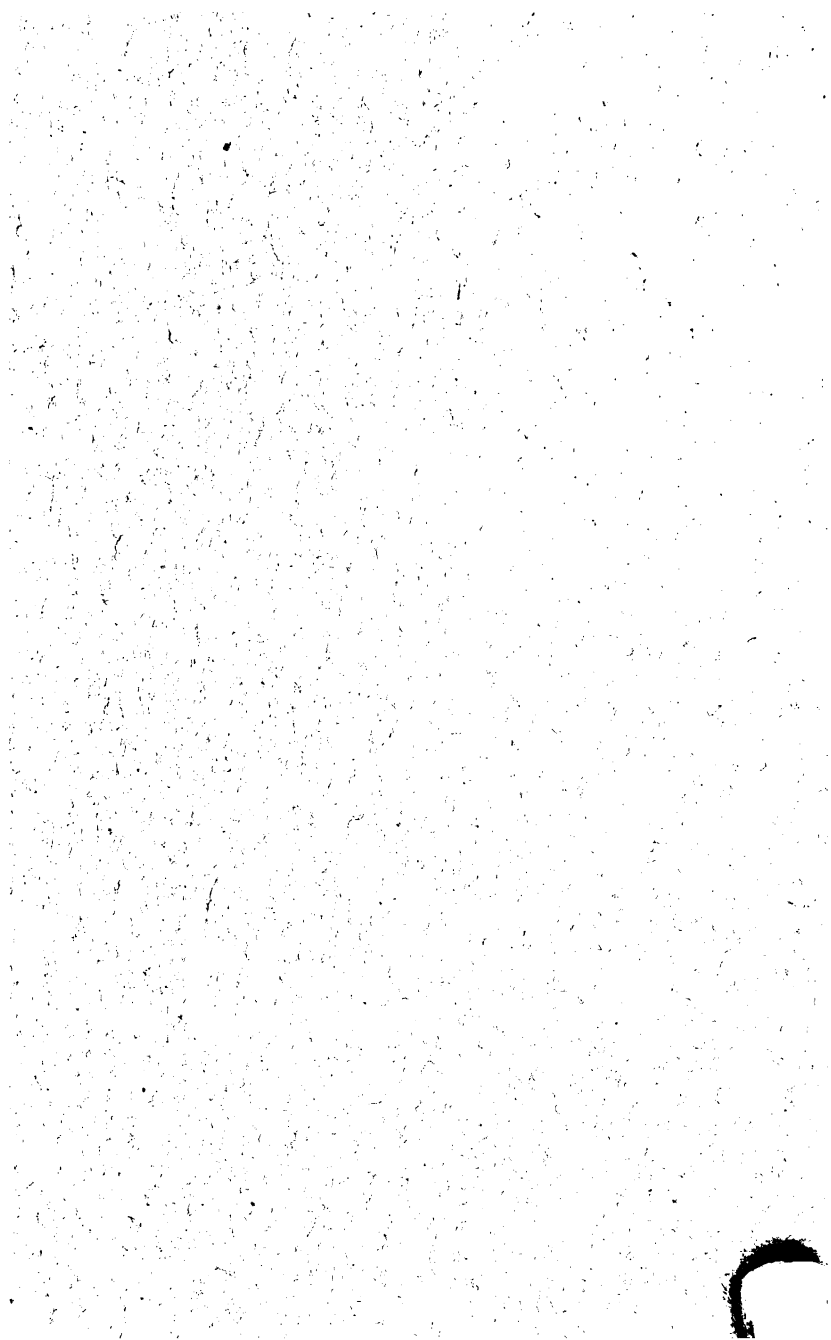
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LORD ORMONT AND HIS AMINTA

VOL. II.

LORD ORMONT AND HIS AMINTA

47097

A Novel

BY

GEORGE MEREDITH

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

LONDON: CHAPMAN AND HALL, LD.

1894

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LORD ORMONT AND HIS AMINTA.

CHAPTER I.

A FLASH OF THE BRUISED WARRIOR.

THE winning of Lord Ormont's consent to look on at the little bout of arms was counted an achievement; for even in his own rarefied upper circle, where the fervid sentiments are not allowed to be seen plunging, he had his troop of enthusiasts; and they were anxious that he should make an appearance in public, to take what consolation a misunderstood and injured man could get from evidence of the grateful esteem entertained for him by a party of

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his countrymen, who might reasonably expect at the same time to set eyes, at rather close quarters, on the wonderful dark beauty, supposed a Spaniard, occasionally beheld riding beside him. If it is possible to connect a woman with the devoutest of their anticipations, the sons of leisure up there will do it. But, in truth, an English world was having cause to ransack the dust-heaps for neglected men of mettle. Our intermittent ague, known as dread of invasion, was over the land. Twice down the columns of panic newspaper correspondence Lord Ormont saw his name cited, with the effect on him that such signs of national repentance approaching lodged a crabbed sourness in his consulting-room, whether of head or breast.

He was assailed by a gusty appeal from Lady Charlotte, bidding him seize the moment to proclaim his views; while the secretary had a private missive from her,


wherein, between insistency and supplication, she directed him to bring the subject before my lord every day, and be sure to write out a fair copy of the epistle previous to the transmission of it. "Capua" was mentioned; she brought in "a siren," too. Her brother was to be the soldier again—fling off silken bonds. The world might prate of his morality; now was the hour for showing his patriotism, casting aside his just anger, and backing his chief's opinion. "A good chance to get their names together." To her brother she declared that the columns of the leading journal were open to him—"in large type"; he was to take her word for it; he had only to "dictate away," quite at his ease, just as he talked at Olmer, and leave the bother of the scribe's business to his *aide*. "Lose no time," she concluded; "the country wants your ideas; let us have *your plan*."

The earl raised his shoulders, and kept

his *aide* exclusively at the Memoirs. Weyburn, however, read out to him, with accentuation, foolish stuff in the recurrent correspondence of the daily sheets, and a complacent burgess article, meant to be a summary of the controversy and a recommendation to the country to bask in the sun of its wealth again.

“Ay, be the porker sow it’s getting liker and liker to every year!” Lord Ormont exclaimed, and sprang on his feet. “Take a pen. Shut up that box. We’ll give ’em digestive biscuits for their weak stomachs. Invasion can’t be done, they say! I tell the doddered asses Napoleon would have been over if Villeneuve had obeyed him to the letter. Villeneuve had a fit of paralysis, owing to the prestige of Nelson—that’s as it happened. And they swear at prestige, won’t believe in it, because it’s not fat bacon. I tell them, after Napoleon’s first battles, prestige did half his work for him.

It saved him at Essling from a plunge into the Danube; it saved him at Moskowa; it would have marched him half over England at his first jump on our shingle beach. But that squelch of fat citizens should be told—to the devil with them! will they ever learn? short of a second William!—there were eight-and-forty hours when the liberty of this country hung wavering in the balance with those Boulogne boats. Now look at Ulm and Austerlitz, Essling, Wagram; put the victors in those little affairs to front our awkward squads. The French could boast a regimental system, and chiefs who held them as the whist-player his hand of cards. Had we a better general than the Archduke Charles? or cavalry and artillery equal to the Hungarian? or drilled infantry numbering within eighty thousand of the Boulogne-Wimereux camps? We had nothing but the raw material of courage—pluck, and




no science. Ask any boxing man what he thinks of the chances. The French might have sacrificed a fleet to land fifty thousand. Our fleet was our one chance. Any foreign General at the head of fifty thousand trained, picked troops would risk it, and cut an *entrechat* for joy of the chance. We should have fought and bled and been marched over—a field of Anglo-Saxon stubble! and Nelson riding the Channel, undisputed lord of the waters. Heigh! by the Lord, this country would have been like a man free to rub his skin with his hand and a mortal disease in his blood. Are you ready? How anticipate a hostile march on the capital, is our business.”

Striding up and down the library, Lord Ormont dropped his wrath to dictate the practical measures for defence—detesting the cat’s-cry “defence,” he said; but the foe would bring his old growlers, and we should have to season our handful of

regulars and mob of levies, turn the mass into troops. With plenty of food, and blows daily, Englishmen soon get stomachs for the right way to play the game; bowl as well as bat; and the sooner they give up the idea of shamming sturdy on a stiff hind leg, the better for their chances. Only, it's a beastly thing to see that for their favourite attitude,—like some dog of a fellow weak in the fists, weaker in the midriff, at a fair, who cries, Come on, and prays his gods you won't. All for peace, the rascal boasts himself, and he beats his wife and kicks his curs at home. Is there any one to help him now, he vomits gold and honours on the man he yesterday treated as a felon. Ha!

Bull the bumpkin disposed of, my lord drew leisurely back from the foeman's landing-place, at the head of a body of serious Englishmen; teaching them to be manageable as chess-pieces, ready as bow-



strings to let fly. Weyburn rejoiced to find himself transcribing crisp sentences, hard on the matter, without garnish of scorn. Kent, Sussex, Surrey, all the southern heights about London, round away to the south-western of the Hampshire heathland, were accurately mapped in the old warrior's brain. He knew his points of vantage by name; there were no references to gazetteer or atlas. A chain of forts and earthworks enables us to choose our ground, not for clinging to them, but for choice of time and place to give battle. If we have not been playing double-dyed traitor to ourselves, we have a preponderating field artillery; our yeomanry and volunteer horsemen are becoming a serviceable cavalry arm; our infantry prove that their heterogeneous composition can be welded to a handy mass, and can stand fire and return it, and not be beaten by an acknowledged defeat.

"That's English! yes, that's English! when they're at it," my lord sang out.

"To know how to take a licking, that wins in the end," cried Weyburn; his former enthusiasm for the hero mounting, enlightened by a reminiscence of the precept he had hammered on the boys at Cuper's.

"They fall well. Yes, the English fall like men," said my lord, pardoning and embracing the cuffed nation. "Bodies knocked over, hearts upright. That's example; we breed Ironsides out of a sight like that. If it weren't for a cursed feeble Government scraping *congés* to the taxpayer—well, so many of our good fellows would not have to fall. That I say; for this thing is going to happen some day, mind you, sir! And I don't want to have puncheons and hogsheads of our English blood poured out merely to water the soil of a conquered country because English

Governments are a craven lot, not daring risk of office by offending the taxpayer. But, on !”

Weyburn sent Lady Charlotte glowing words of the composition in progress.

They worked through a day, and a second day—talked of nothing else in the intervals. Explanatory answers were vouchsafed to Aminta’s modest inquiries at lunch, as she pictured scenes of smoke, dust and blood from the overpowering plain masculine lines they drew, terrible in bluntness. The third morning Lord Ormont had map and book to verify distances and attempt a scale of heights, take names of estates, farms, parishes, commons, patches of woodland. Weyburn wrote his fair copy on folio paper, seven-and-thirty pages. He read it aloud to the author on the afternoon of the fourth day, with the satisfaction in his voice that he felt. My lord listened and nodded. The plan for the

defence of England's heart was a good plan.

He signed to have the manuscript handed to him. A fortified London secure of the Thames for abundant supplies, well able to breathe within earthworks extending along the southern hills, was clearly shown to stand the loss of two big battles on the Sussex weald or more East to North-east, if fortune willed it.

He rose from his chair, paced some steps, with bent head, came back thoughtfully, lifted the manuscript sheets for another examination. Then he stooped to the fire, spreading the edges unevenly, so that they caught flame. Weyburn spied at him. It was to all appearance the doing of a man who had intended it and brought it to the predetermined conclusion.

"About time for you to be off for your turn at Chiallo's," our country's defender remarked, after tossing the last half-

burnt lump under the grate and shovelling at it.


“I will go, my lord,” said Weyburn ; and he was glad to go.

He went, calculated his term of service under Lord Ormont. He was young, not a philosopher. Waste of anything was abhorrent to a nature pointed at store of daily gain, if it were only the gain in a new or a freshened idea ; and time lost, work lost, good counsel to the nation lost, represented horrid vacuity to him, and called up the counter demonstration of a dance down the halls of madness, for proof that we should, at least, have jolly motion of limbs there before Perdition struck the great gong. Ay, and we should be twirling with a fair form on the arm : woman and man ; as it ought to be ; twirling downward, true, but together ! Such a companionship has a wisdom to raise it above the title of madness. Name it, heartily, pleasure ; and in

contempt of the moralist burgess, praise the dance of the woman and the man together high over a curmudgeonly humping solitariness, that won't forgive an injury, nurses rancour, smacks itself in the face, because it can't—to use the old schoolboy words—take a licking!

These were the huddled, drunken sensations and thoughts entertained by Weyburn, without his reflecting on the detachment from his old hero, of which they were the sign. He criticized impulsively, and fancied he did no more, and was not doing much; though, in fact, criticism is the end of worship; the Brutus blow at that Imperial but mortal bosom.

The person criticized was manifest. Who was the woman he twirled with? She was unfeatured, undistinguished, one of the sex, or all the sex: the sex to be shunned as our deadly sapper of gain, unless we find the chosen one to super-terrestrialize it and us,



and trebly and trebly outdo our gift of our whole self for her.

She was indistinguishable, absolutely unknown ; yet she murmured, or seemed to murmur—for there was no sound—a complaint of Lord Ormont. And she, or some soundless mouth of woman, said he was a splendid military hero, a chivalrous man, a man of inflexible honour ; but had no understanding of how to treat a woman, or belief in her having equal life with him on earth.

She was put aside rather petulantly, and she took her seat out of the whirl with submission. Thinking she certainly was not Brownie, whom he would have known among a million, he tried to quit the hall, and he twirled afresh, necessarily not alone ; it is the unpardonable offence both to the Graces and the Great Mother for man to valse alone. She twirled on his arm, uninvited ; accepted, as in the course of nature ;

hugged, under dictate of the nature of the man steeled against her by the counting of gain, and going now at desperation's pace, by very reason of those defensive locked steam-valves meant to preserve him from this madness,—for the words of the red-lipped mate, where there were no words, went through him, like a music when the bow is over the viol, sweeping imagination, and they said her life was wasting.

Was not she a priceless manuscript cast to the flames? Her lord had been at some trouble to win her. Or his great fame and his shadowed fortunes had won her. He took her for his own, and he would not call her his own. He comported himself with absolute, with kindly deference to the lady whose more than vital spark he let the gossips puff at and blur. He praised her courage, visibly admired her person, admitted her in private to be his equal, degraded her in public. Could anything

account for the behaviour of so manly and noble a gentleman?—Rhetoric made the attempt, and Weyburn gave up the windy business.

Discovering that his fair partner of the wasting life was—he struggled to quench the revelation—Aminta, he stopped the dance. If there was no gain in whirling fancifully with one of the sex, a spin of a minute with her was downright bankruptcy.

He was young, full of blood; his heart led him away from the door Lord Ormont had exposed; at which a little patient unemotional watchfulness might have intimated to him something besides the simple source of the old hero's complex chapter of conduct. As it was, Weyburn did see the rancour of a raw wound in operation. But he moralized and disapproved; telling himself, truly enough, that so it would not have been with him; instead of sounding at

my lord's character, and his condition of the unjustly neglected great soldier, for the purpose of asking how that raw wound would affect an injured veteran, who compressed, almost repressed, the roar of Achilles, though his military bright name was to him his Briseis.

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CHAPTER II.

A SHORT PASSAGE IN THE GAME PLAYED BY TWO.

POLITEST of men in the domestic circle and everywhere among women, Lord Ormont was annoyed to find himself often gruffish behind the tie of his cravat. Indeed, the temper of our eminently serene will feel the strain of a doldrum-dulness that is goaded to activity by a nettle. The forbearance he carried farther than most could do was tempted to kick, under pressure of Mrs. Nargett Pagnell. Without much blaming Aminta, on whose behalf he submitted to it, and whose resolution to fix in England had brought it to this crisis, he magnanimously

proposed to the Fair Enemy he forced her to be, and liked to picture her as being, a month in Paris.

Aminta declined it for herself; after six or more years of travelling, she wished to settle, and know her country, she said: a repetition remark, wide of the point, and indicatory to the game of Pull she was again playing beneath her smooth visage, unaware that she had the wariest of partners at the game.

“But go you—do, I beg,” she entreated. “It will give you new impressions; and I cannot bear to tie you down here.”

“How you can consent to be tied down here, is the wonder to me!” said he. “When we travelled through the year, just visited England and were off again, we were driving on our own road. Vienna in April and May—what do you say? You like the reviews there, and the dances, concerts; Zigeuner bands, military Bohemian bands.

Or Egypt to-morrow, if you like—though you can't be permitted to swim in the Nile, as you wanted. Come, Xarifa, speak it. I go to exile without you. Say you come."

She smiled firmly. The name of her honeymoon days was not a cajolery to her.

His name had been that of the Christian Romancero Knight Durandarte, and she gave it to him, to be on the proper level with him, while she still declined.

"Well, but just a month in Paris! There's nothing doing here. And we both like the French theatre."

"London will soon be filling."

"Well, but——" He stopped; for the filling of London did really concern her, in the game of Pull she was covertly playing with him. "You seem to have caught the fever of this London; . . . no bands, . . . no reviews . . . Low comedy acting." He muttered his objections to London.

"The society of people speaking one's

own tongue, add that," she ventured to say.

"You know you are ten times more Spanish than English. Moorish, if you like."

"The slave of the gallant Christian Knight, converted, baptized, and blissful. Oh, I know. But now we are settled in England I have a wish to study English society."

"Disappointing, I assure you ;—dinners heavy, dancing boorish, intrigue a blind-man's-buff. We've been over it all before !"

"We have."

"Admired, I dare say. You won't be understood."

"I like my countrymen."

"The women have good looks—of the ungarnished kind. The men are louts."

"They are brave."

"You're to see their fencing. You'll own a little goes a long way."

“I think it will amuse me.”

“So I thought when I gave the nod to Isabella your friend.”

“You like her?”

“You, too.”

“One fancies she would make an encouraging second in a duel.”

“I will remember . . . when I call you out.”

“Oh, my dear lord, you have dozens to choose from ; leave me my one, if we are to enter the lists.”

“We are, it seems ; unless you consent to take the run to Paris. You are to say Tom, or Rowsley.”

“The former, I never can feel at home in saying ; Rowsley is Lady Charlotte’s name for you.”

The name of Lady Charlotte was an invitation to the conflict between them. He passed it, and said : “Durandarte runs a mile on the mouth, and the Coriolanus

of their newspapers helps a stage-player to make lantern jaws. Neither of them comes well from the lips of my girl. After seven years she should have hit on a nickname, if none of the Christian suit. I am not 'at home' either with 'my lord.' However, you send me off to Paris alone; and you'll be alone and dull here in this London. Incomprehensible to me why!"

"We are both wondering?" said Aminta.

"You're handsomer than when I met you first—by heaven you are!"

She flushed her dark brown-red late-sunset. "Brunes are exceptional in England."

"Thousands admiring you, of course! I know, my love, I have a jewel."

She asked him: "What are jewels for?" and he replied, "To excite cupidity."

"When they're shut in a box?"

"Ware burglars! But this one is not

shut up. She shuts herself up. And up go her shoulders! Decide to be out of it, and come to Paris for some life for a month. No? It's positive? When do you expect your little school friend?"

"After Easter. Aunt will be away."

"Your little friend likes the country. I'll go to my house agents. If there's a country house open on the upper Thames, you can have swimming, boating, botanizing . . . "

He saw her throat swallow. But as he was offering agreeable things he chose to not understand how he was to be compassionate.

"Steignton?" she said, and did her cause no good by saying it feebly.

His look of a by-gone awake-in-sleep old look, drearily known to her, was like a strip of sunlight on a fortress wall. It signified, Is the poor soul pushing me back to that again?

She compelled herself to say: "Your tenant there?"

"Matter of business . . . me and my tenant," he remarked. "The man pays punctually."

"The lease has expired."

"Not quite. You are misinformed."

"At Easter."

"Ah! Question of renewing."

"You were fond of the place."

"I was fond of the place? Thank Blazes, I'm not what I was!" He paced about. "There's not a corner of the place that doesn't screw an eye at me, because I had a dream there. *La gloire!*"

The rest he muttered. "These English!" was heard.

Aminta said: "Am I never to see Steignton?"

Lord Ormont invoked the Powers. He could not really give answer to this female talk of the eternities.

"Beaten I can never be," he said, with instinctive indulgence to the greater creature. "But down there at Steignton, I should be haunted by a young donkey swearing himself the fellow I grew up out of. No doubt of that. I don't like him the better for it. Steignton grimaces at a cavalry officer fool enough at his own risks and penalties to help save India for the English. Maunderers! You can't tell—they don't know themselves—what they mean. Except that they're ready to take anything you hand 'em, and then pipe to your swinging. I served them well—and at my age, in full activity, they condemn me to sit and gape!"

He stopped his pacing and gazed on the glass of the window.

"Would you wish me not to be present at this fencing?" said Aminta.

"Dear me! by all means, go, my love," he replied.

Any step his Fair Enemy won in the secret game of Pull between them, she was undisputedly to keep.

She suggested: "It might lead to unpleasantness."

"Of what sort?"

"You ask?"

He emphasized: "Have you forgotten? Something happened after that last ball at Challis's Rooms. Their women as well as their men must be careful not to cross me."

Aminta had confused notions of her being planted in hostile territory, and torn and knitted, trumpeted to the world as mended, but not honourably mended in a way to stop corridor scandal. The ball at Challis's Rooms had been one of her steps won: it had necessitated a requirement for the lion in her lord to exhibit himself, and she had gained nothing with Society by the step, owing to her poor performance of the

lion's mate. She had, in other words, shunned the countenance of some scattered people pityingly ready to support her against the deadly passive party known to be Lady Charlotte's.

She let her lord go ; thinking that once more had she striven and gained nothing : which was true of all their direct engagements. And she had failed because of her being only a woman ! Mr. Morsfield was foolishly wrong in declaring that she, as a woman, had reserves of strength. He was perhaps of Lady Charlotte's mind with regard to the existence of a Countess of Ormont, or he would know her to be incredibly cowardly. Cowardly under the boast of pride, too ; well, then, say, if you like, a woman !

Yet this mere shallow woman would not hesitate to meet the terrible Lady Charlotte at any instant, on any terms : and what are we to think of a soldier, hero, lion,

dreading to tell her to her face that the persecuted woman is his wife !

“Am I a woman they can be ashamed of?” she asked, and did not seek the answer at her mirror. She was in her bedroom, and she put out a hand to her jewel-box, fingered it, found it locked, and abandoned her idle project. A gentleman was “dangerous.” She had not found him so. He had the reputation, perhaps, because he was earnest. Not so very many men are earnest. She called to recollection how ludicrously practical he was in the thick of his passion. His third letter (addressed to the Countess of Ormont—whom he manifestly did not or would not take to be the veritable Countess—and there was much to plead for his error), or was it his fourth?—the letters were a tropical hail-storm :—third or fourth, he broke off a streaked thunderpeal, to capitulate his worldly possessions, give the names

and degrees of kinship of his relatives, the exact amount of the rent-roll of his Yorkshire estates, of his funded property.

Silly man ! but not contemptible. He proposed everything in honour, from his view of it.

Whether in his third, fourth, or fifth letter. . . . How many had come ? She drew the key from her purse, and opened a drawer. The key of the jewel-box was applied to the lock.

Mr. Morsfield had sent her six flaming letters. He not only took no precautions, he boasted that he hailed the consequences of discovery. Six !

She lifted a pen : it had to be done.

He was briefly informed that he disturbed her peace. She begged he would abstain from any further writing to her.

The severity was in the brevity. The contrast of her style and his appeared harsh. But it belonged to the position.

Having with one dash of the pen scribbled her three lines, she slipped the letter into her pocket. That was done, and it had to be done; it ought to have been done before. How simple it was when one contemplated it as actually done! Aminta made the motion of a hand along the paper, just a flourish. Soon after, her head dropped back on the chair, and her eyes shut; she took in breath through parted lips. The brief lines of writing had cut away a lump of her vitality.

CHAPTER III.

THE SECRETARY TAKEN AS AN ANTIDOTE.

DUSTY wayfarers along a white high-road who know of a bubbling little spring across a stile, on the woodland borders of deep grass, are hailed to sit aside it awhile; and Aminta's feverishness was cooled by now and then a quiet conversation with the secretary ambitious to become a school-master. Lady Charlotte liked him, so did her lord; Mrs. Lawrence had chatted with him freshly, as it was refreshing to recollect; nobody thought him a stunted growth.

In Aminta's realized recollections, amid the existing troubles of her mind, the

charge against him grew paler, and she could no longer quite think that the young hero transformed into a Mr. Cuper had deceived her, though he had done it—much as if she had assisted at the planting and watched aforetime the promise of a noble tree, to find it, after an interval of years, pollarded—a short trunk shooting out a shock of small, slim, stiff branches; dwarfed and disgraced; serviceable perhaps; not ludicrous or ugly, certainly, taking it for a pollard. And he was a cool well-spring to talk with. He, supposed once to be a passionate nature, scorned passion as a madness; he smiled in his merciful executioner's way at the high society, of which her aim was to pass for one among the butterflies or dragonflies; he had lost his patriotism; he labelled our English classes *the skimmers, the gorgers, the grubbers*, and stigmatized them with a friendly air; and uttered words of tolerance

only for farmers and surgeons and school-masters. But that was quite incidental in the humorous run of his talk, diverting to hear while it lasted. He had, of course, a right to his ideas.

No longer concerned in contesting them, she drank at the water of this plain earth-well, and hoped she preferred it to fiery draughts, though it was flattish, or, say, flavourless. In the other there was excess of flavour—or, no, spice it had to be called. The young schoolmaster's world seemed a sunless place, the world of traders bargaining for gain, without a glimmer of the rich generosity to venture life, give it, dare all for native land—or for the one beloved. Love pressed its claim on heroical generosity, and instantly it suffused her, as an earth under flush of sky. The one beloved! She had not known love; she was in her five-and-twentieth year, and love was not only unknown to her, it was shut away

from her by the lock of a key that opened on no estimable worldly advantage in exchange, but opened on a dreary, clouded round, such as she had used to fancy it must be to the beautiful creamy circus-horse of the tossing mane and flowing tail and superb step. She was admired; she was just as much doomed to a round of paces, denied the glorious fling afield, her nature's food. Hitherto she would have been shamefaced as a boy in forming the word 'love': now, believing it denied to her for good and all—for ever and ever—her bosom held and uttered the word. She saw the word, the nothing but the word that it was, and she envisaged it, for the purpose of saying adieu to it—good-bye even to the poor empty word.

This condition was attributable to a gentleman's wild raging with the word, into which he had not infused the mystic spirit. He poured hot wine and spiced. If not

the spirit of love, it was really the passion of the man. Her tremors now and again in the reading of his later letters humiliated her, in the knowledge that they came of no response to him, but from the temporary base acquiescence ; which is, with women, a terrible perception of the gulf of their unsatisfied nature.

The secretary, cheerful at his work, was found for just the opening of a door. Sometimes she hesitated—to disturb him, she said to herself,—and went up-stairs or out visiting. He protested that he could work on and talk too. She was able to amuse her lord with some of his ideas. He had a stock of them, all his own.

Ideas, new-born and naked original ideas, are acceptable at no time to the humanity they visit to help uplift it from the state of beast. In the England of that period original or unknown ideas were a smoking brimstone to the nose, dread Arabian afrites,

invisible in the air, jumping out of vases, armed for the slaughter of the venerable and the cherished, the ivy-clad and celestially haloed. They carried the dishevelled Mænads' torch. A step with them, and we were on the Phlegethon waters of the French Revolution. For a publication of simple ideas men were seized, tried at law, mulcted, imprisoned, and not pardoned after the term of punishment; their names were branded; the horned elect butted at them; he who breathed them offered them up, wittingly or not, to be damned in the nose of the public for an execrable brimstone stench.

Lord Ormont broke through his shouts or grunts at Aminta's report of the secretary's *ideas* on various topics, particularly the proposal that the lords of the land should head the land in a revolutionary effort to make law of his crazy, top-heavy notions, with a self-satisfied ejaculation: "He has

not favoured *me* with any of these puff-balls of his."

The deduction was, that the author sagaciously considered them adapted for the ear of a woman ; they were womanish—*i. e.* flighty, gossamer. To the host of males, all ideas are female until they are made facts.

This idea, proposing it to our aristocracy to take up his other ideas, or reject them on pain of the forfeiture of their caste and headship with the generations to follow, and a total displacing of them in history by certain notorious, frowsy, scrubby pamphleteers and publishers, Lord Ormont thought amazingly comical. English nobles heading the weavers, cobblers, and barbers of England ! He laughed, but he said, "Charlotte would listen to that."

The dread, high-sitting Lady Charlotte was, in his lofty thinking, a woman, and would therefore listen to nonsense, if it

happened to strike a particular set of bells hanging in her cranium. She patronized blasphemous and traitorous law-breakers, just to keep up the pluck of the people, not with a notion of maintaining our English aristocracy eminent in history.

Lady Charlotte, however, would be the foremost to swoop down on the secretary's ideas about the education of women.

On that subject, Aminta said she did not know what to think.

Now, if a man states the matter he thinks, and a woman does but listen, whether inclining to agree or not, a perceptible stamp is left on soft wax. Lord Ormont told her so, with cavalier kindness.

She confessed "she did not know what to think," when the secretary proposed the education and collocation of boys and girls in one group, never separated, declaring it the only way for them to learn to know and to respect one another. They

were to learn together, play together, have matches together, as a scheme for stopping the mischief between them.

"But, my dear girl, don't you see, the devilry was intended by Nature. Life would be the coldest of dishes without it." And as for mixing the breeched and petticoated in those young days—"I can't enter into it," my lord considerably said. "All I can tell you is, I know boys."

Aminta persisted in looking thoughtful.

"Things are bad, as they are now," she said.

"Always were—always will be. They were intended to be, if we are to call them bad. Botched mendings will only make them worse."

"Which side suffers?"

"Both; and both like it. One side must be beaten at any game. It's off and on, pretty equal—except in the sets where one side wears thick boots. Is this

fellow for starting a mixed sexes school? Funny mothers!"

"I suppose——" Aminta said, and checked the supposition. "The mothers would not leave their girls unless they were confident . . . ?"

"There's to be a female head of the female department? He reckons on finding a woman as big a fool as himself! A fair bit of reckoning enough. He's clever at the pen. He doesn't bother me with his ideas; now and then I've caught a sound of his bee buzzing."

The secretary was left undisturbed at his labours for several days.

He would have been gladdened by a brighter look of her eyes at her next coming. They were introspective and beamless. She had an odd leaning to the talk upon Cuper's boys. He was puzzled by what he might have classed, in any other woman, as a want of delicacy, when

she recurred to incidents which were red patches of the school time, and had clearly lost their glow for her.

A letter once written by him, in his early days at Cuper's, addressed to J. Masner, containing a provocation to fight with any weapons, and signed, "Your Antagonist," had been read out to the whole school, under strong denunciation of the immorality, the unchristian-like conduct of the writer, by Mr. Cuper; creating a sensation that had travelled to Miss Vincent's establishment, where some of the naughtiest of the girls had taken part with the audacious challenger, dreadful though the contemplation of a possible duel so close to them was. And then the girls heard that the anonymous "Your Antagonist," on being cited to proclaim himself in public assembly of school-mates and masters, had jumped on his legs and into the name of — one who was previously thought by Miss Vincent's good

girls incapable of the "appalling wickedness," as Mr. Cuper called it, of signing "Your Antagonist" to a Christian school-fellow, having the design to provoke a breach of the law of the land and shed Christian blood. Mr. Cuper delivered an impressive sermon from his desk to the standing-up boarders and day scholars alike, vilifying the infidel Greek word "antagonist."

"Do you remember the offender's name?" the Countess of Ormont said; and Weyburn said—

"Oh yes, I've not forgotten the incident."

Her eyes, wherein the dead time hung just above the underlids, lingered, as with the wish for him to name the name.

She said: "I am curious to hear how you would treat a case of that sort. Would you preach to the boys?"

"Ten words at most. The right assumption is, that both fellows were to blame. I fancy the proper way would be

to appeal to the naughty girls for their opinion as to how the dispute should be decided."

"You impose too much on them. And you are not speaking seriously."

"Pardon me, I am. I should throw myself into the mind of a naughty girl—supposing none of them at hand—and I should let it be known that my eyes were shut to proceedings, always provided the weapons were not such as would cause a shock of alarm in female bosoms."

"You would at your school allow it to be fought out?"

"Judging by the characters of the boys. If they had heads to understand, I would try them at their heads. Otherwise they are the better, they come round quicker to good blood, at their age—I speak of English boys—for a little hostile exercise of their fists. Well, for one thing, it teaches them the value of sparring."

"I must imagine I am not one of the naughty sisterhood; for I cannot think I should ever give consent to fighting of any description, unless for the very best of reasons," said the countess.

His eyes were at the trick of the quarter-minute's poisoning. Her lids fluttered. "Oh, I don't mean to say I was one of the good," she added.

At the same time her enlivened memory made her conscious of a warning, that she might, as any woman might, so talk on of past days as to take rather more than was required of the antidote she had come for.

The antidote was excellent; cooling, fortifying; "quite a chalybeate," her aunt would say, and she was thankful. Her heart rose on a quiet wave of the thanks, and pitched down to a depth of uncounted fathoms. Aminta was unable to tell herself why.

Mrs. Lawrence Finchley had been announced. On her way to the drawing-room Aminta's brain fell upon a series of dots, that wound along a track to the point where she accused herself of a repented coquetry—cause of the burning letters she was doomed to receive and could not stop without rousing her lion. She dotted backwards; there was no sign that she had been guilty of any weakness other than the almost—at least, in design—innocent first move, which had failed to touch Lord Ormont in the smallest degree. Never failure more absolute !

She was about to inquire of her bosom's oracle whether she greatly cared now. For an answer, her brain went dotting along from Mr. Cuper's school, and a boy named Abner there, and a boy named Matey Weyburn, who protected the little Jew-boy, up to Mr. Abner in London, who recommended him in due season to various

acquaintances; among them to Lady Charlotte Eglett. Hence the introduction to Lord Ormont. How little extraordinary circumstances are, if only we trace them to the source!

But if only it had appeared marvellous, the throbbing woman might have seized on it, as a thing fateful, an intervention distinctly designed to waken the best in her, which was, after all, the strongest. Yes, she could hope and pray and believe it was the strongest.

She was listening to Isabella Lawrence Finchley, wishing she might have followed to some end the above line of her meditations.

Mrs. Lawrence was changed, much warmer, pressing to be more than merely friendly. Aminta twice gave her cheek for kisses. The secretary had spoken of Mrs. Lawrence as having the look of a handsome boy; and Aminta's view of her

now underwent a change likewise. Compunction, together with a sisterly taste for the boyish fair one flying her sail independently, and gallantly braving the winds, induced her to kiss in return.

“You do like me a morsel?” said Mrs. Lawrence. “I fell in love with you the last time I was here. I came to see Mr. Secretary—it’s avowed; and I have been thinking of you ever since, of no one else. Oh, yes, for a man; but you caught me. I’ve been hearing of him from Captain May. They fence at those rooms. And it’s funny, Mr. Morsfield practises there, you know; and there was a time when the lovely innocent Amy, Queen of Blondes, held the seat of the Queen of Brunets. Ah, my dear, the infidelity of men doesn’t count. They are affected by the changing moons. As long as the captain is civil to him, we may be sure beautiful Amy has not complained. Her husband is the pistol

she carries in her pocket, and she has fired him twice, with effect. Through love of you I have learnt the different opinion the world of the good has of her and of me ; I thought we ran under a common brand. There are gradations. I went to throw myself at the feet of my great-aunt, good old great-aunt Lady de Culme, who is a power in the land. I let her suppose I came for myself, and she reproached me with Lord Adder. I confessed to him and ten others. She is a dear, she's ticklish, and at eighty-four she laughed ! She looked into my eyes and saw a field with never a man in it—just a shadow of a man. She admitted the ten cancelled the one, and exactly named to me, by comparison with the erring Amy, the sinner I am and must be, if I'm to live. So, dear, the end of it is," and Mrs. Lawrence put her fingers to a silken amber bow at Aminta's throat, and squared it and flattened it with dainty pre-

cision, speaking on under dropped eyelids, intent upon her work, "Lady de Culme will be happy to welcome you whenever it shall suit the Countess of Ormont to accompany her disreputable friend. But what can I do, dear?" She raised her lids and looked beseechingly. "I was born with this taste for the ways and games and style of men. I hope I don't get on badly with women; but if I'm not allowed to indulge my natural taste, I kick the stable-boards and bite the manger."

Aminta threw her arms round her, and they laughed their mutual peal.

Caressing her still, Aminta said: "I don't know whether I embrace a boy."

"That idea comes from a man!" said Mrs. Lawrence.

It was admitted. The secretary was discussed.

Mrs. Lawrence remarked: "Yes, I like talking with him; he's bright. You drove

him out of me the day I saw him. Doesn't he give you the idea of a man who insists on capturing you and lets it be seen he doesn't care two snaps of a finger?"

Aminta petitioned on his behalf indifferently: "He's well bred."

She was inattentive to Mrs. Lawrence's answer. The allusion of the Queen of Blondes had stung her in the unacknowledged regions where women discard themselves and are most sensitive.

"Decide on coming soon to Lady de Culme," said Mrs. Lawrence. "Now that her arms are open to you, she would like to have you in them. She is old——. You won't be rigorous? no standing on small punctilios? She would call, but she does not—h'm, it is M. le Comte that she does not choose to—h'm. But her arms are open to the countess. It ought to be a grand step. You may be assured that Lady Charlotte Eglett would not be taken

into them. My great-aunt has a great-aunt's memory. The Ormonts are the only explanation—if it's an apology—she can offer for the behaviour of the husband of the Countess of Ormont. You know I like him. I can't help liking a man who likes me. Is that the way with a boy, Mr. Secretary? I must have another talk with the gentleman, my dear. You are Aminta to me."

"Always Aminta to you," was the reply, tenderly given.

"But as for comprehending him, I'm as far off that as Lady de Culme, who hasn't the liking for him I have."

"The earl?" said Aminta, showing by her look that she was in the same position.

Mrs. Lawrence shrugged: "I believe men and women marry in order that they should never be able to understand one another. The riddle's best read at a moder-

ate distance. It's what they call the golden mean; too close, too far, we're strangers. I begin to understand that husband of mine, now we're on bowing terms. Now, I must meet the earl to-morrow. You will arrange? His hand wants forcing. Upon my word, I don't believe it's more."

Mrs. Lawrence contrasted him in her mind with the husband she knew, and was invigorated by the thought that a placable impenetrable giant may often be more pliable in a woman's hands than an irascible dwarf—until, perchance, the latter has been soundly cuffed, and then he is docile to trot like a squire, as near your heels as he can get. She rejoiced to be working for the woman she had fallen in love with.

Aminta promised herself to show the friend a livelier affection at their next meeting.

A seventh letter, signed "Adolphus," came by post, was read and locked up in

her jewel-box. They were all nigh destruction for a wavering minute or so. They were placed where they lay because the first of them had been laid there, the box being a strong one, under a patent key, and discovery would mean the terrible. They had not been destroyed because they had, or seemed to her to have, the language of passion. She could read them unmoved, and appease a wicked craving she owned to having, and reproached herself with having, for that language.

Was she not colour in the sight of men? Here was one, a mouthpiece of numbers, who vowed that homage was her due, and devotion, the pouring forth of the soul to her. What was the reproach if she read the stuff unmoved?

But peruse and reperuse it, and ask impressions to tell our deepest instinct of truthfulness whether language of this character can have been written to two women

by one hand ! Men are cunning. Can they catch a tone ? Not that tone !

She, too, Mrs. Amy May, was colour in the sight of men. Yet it seemed that he could not have written so to the Queen of Blondes. And she, by repute, was as dangerous to slight as he to attract. Her indifference exonerated him. Besides, a Queen of Blondes would not draw the hearts out of men in England, as in Italy and in Spain. Aminta had got thus far when she found "Queen of Brunet" expunged by a mist: she imagined hearing the secretary's laugh. She thought he was right to laugh at her. She retorted simply: "These are feelings that are poetry."

A man may know nothing about them, and be an excellent schoolmaster.

Suggestions touching the prudence of taking Mrs. Lawrence into her confidence, as regarded these troublesome letters of

the man with the dart in his breast, were shuffled aside for various reasons: her modesty shrank; and a sense of honour toward the man forbade it. She would have found it easier to do if she had conspired against her heart in doing it. And yet, cold-bloodedly to expose him and pluck the clothing from a passion—dear to think of only when it is profoundly secret—struck her as an extreme baseness, of which not even the woman who perused and reperused his letters could be guilty.

Her head rang with some of the lines, and she accused her head of the crime of childishness, seeing that her heart was not an accomplice. At the same time, her heart cried out violently against the business of a visit to Lady de Culme, and all the steps it involved. Justly she accused her heart of treason. Heart and head were severed. This, as she partly apprehended, is the state of the woman who is already

on the slope of her nature's mine-shaft, dreading the rush downwards, powerless to break away from the light.

Letters perused and reperused, coming from a man never fervently noticed in person, conjure features one would wish to put beside the actual, to make sure that the fiery lines he writes are not practising a beguilement. Aminta had lost grasp of the semblance of the impassioned man. She just remembered enough of his eyes to think there might be healing in a sight of him.

Latterly she had refused to be exhibited to a tattling world as the great nobleman's conquest:—The *Beautiful Lady Doubtful* of a report that had scorched her ears. Theatres, rides, pleasure-drives, even such houses as she saw standing open to her had been shunned. Now she asked the earl to ride in the park.

He complied, and sent to the stables

immediately, just noted another of her veerings. The whimsy creatures we are matched to contrast with, shift as the very winds or feather-grasses in the wind. Possibly a fine day did it. Possibly, too, her not being requested to do it.

He was proud of her bearing on horse-back. She rode well and looked well. A finer weapon wherewith to strike at a churlish world was never given into the hands of man. These English may see in her, if they like, that they and their laws and customs are defied. It does her no hurt, and it hits them a ringing buffet.

Among the cavaliers they passed was Mr. Morsfield. He rode by slowly. The earl stiffened his back in returning the salute. Both that and the gentleman were observed by Aminta.

"He sees to having good blood under him," said the earl.

"I admired his mount," she replied.

Interpreted by the fire of his writing, his features expressed character: insomuch that a woman could say of another woman, that she admired him and might reasonably do so. His gaze at her in the presence of her lord was audacious.

He had the defect of his virtue of courage. Yet a man indisputably possessing courage cannot but have an interesting face—though one may continue saying, Pity that the eyes are not a little wider apart! He dresses tastefully; the best English style. A portrait by a master hand might hand him down to generations as an ancestor to be proud of. But with passion and with courage, and a bent for snatching at the lion's own, does he not look foredoomed to an early close? Her imagination called up a portrait of Elizabeth's Earl of Essex to set beside him; and without thinking that the two were fraternally

alike, she sent him riding away with the face of the Earl of Essex and the shadow of the unhappy nobleman's grievous fortunes over his head.

But it is inexcusable to let the mind be occupied recurrently by a man who has not moved the feelings, wicked though it be to have the feelings moved by him. Aminta rebuked her silly wits, and proceeded to speculate from an altitude, seeing the man's projects in a singularly definite minuteness, as if the crisis he invoked, the perils he braved, the mute participation he implored of her for the short space until their fate should be decided, were a story sharply cut on metal. Several times she surprised herself in an interesting pursuit of the story; abominably cold, abominably interested. She fell upon a review of small duties of the day, to get relief; and among them a device for spiriting away her aunt from the table where Mrs. Lawrence wished

to meet Lord Ormont. It sprang up to her call like an imp of the burning pit. She saw it ingenious and of natural aspect. I must be a born intriguer! she said in her breast. That was hateful; but it seemed worse when she thought of a woman commanding the faculty and consenting to be duped and foiled. That might be termed despicable; but what if she had not any longer the wish to gain her way with her lord?

Those letters are acting like a kind of poison in me! her heart cried: and it was only her head that dwelt on the antidote.

CHAPTER IV.

MORE OF CUPER'S BOYS.

ENTERING the dining-room at the appointed minute in a punctual household, Mrs. Lawrence informed the company that she had seen a Horse Guards orderly at the trot up the street. Weyburn said he was directing a boy to ring the bell of the house for him. Lord Ormont went to the window.

“Amends and honours?” Mrs. Lawrence hummed; and added an operative flourish of an arm. Something like it might really be imagined. A large square missive was handed to the footman. Thereupon the orderly trotted off.

My lord took seat at table, telling the

footman to lay "that parcel" beside the clock on the mantelpiece. Aminta and Mrs. Lawrence gave out a little cry of bird or mouse, pitiable to hear: they could not wait, they must know, they pished at sight of plates. His look deferred to their good pleasure, like the dead hand of a clock under key; and Weyburn placed the missive before him, seeing by the superscription that it was not official.

It was addressed, in the Roman hand of a boy's copybook writing, to

*"General the Earl of Ormont, K.C.B., etc.,
Horse Guards,
London."*

The earl's eyebrows creased up over the address; they came down low on the contents.

He resumed his daily countenance. "Nothing of importance," he said to the ladies.

Mrs. Lawrence knocked the table with her knuckles.

Aminta put out a hand, in sign of her wish.

“Pray let me see it.”

“After lunch will do.”

“No, no, no! We are women—we are women,” cried Mrs. Lawrence.

“How can it concern women?”

“As well ask how a battle-field concerns them!”

“Yes, the shots hit us behind you,” said Aminta; and she, too, struck the table.

He did not prolong their torture. Weyburn received the folio sheet and passed it on. Aminta read. Mrs. Lawrence jumped from her chair and ran to the countess's shoulder; her red lips formed the petitioning word to the earl for the liberty she was bent to take.

“Peep? if you like,” my lord said, jesting

at the blank she would find, and soft to the pretty play of her mouth.

When the ladies had run to the end of it, he asked them: "Well; now, then?"

"But it's capital!—the dear laddies!" Mrs. Lawrence exclaimed.

Aminta's eyes met Weyburn's.

She handed him the sheet of paper; upon the transmission of which empty thing from the Horse Guards my lord commented: "An orderly!"

Weyburn scanned it rapidly, for the table had been served.

The contents were these:—

"HIGH BRENT NEAR ATTSWELL,

"April 7th.

"To GENERAL THE EARL OF ORMONT.

"*Cavalry.*

"May it please your Lordship, we, the boys of Mr. Cuper's school, are desirous to bring to the notice of the bravest officer England possesses now living, a Deed of

Heroism by a little boy and girl, children of our school laundress, aged respectively eight and six, who, seeing a little fellow in the water out of depth, and sinking twice, before the third time jumped in to save him, though unable to swim themselves; the girl aged six first, we are sorry to say, but the brother, Robert Coop, followed her example, and together they made a line, and she caught hold of the drowning boy, and he held her pettycoats, and so they pulled. We have seen the place: it is not a nice one. They got him ashore at last. The park-keeper here going along found them dripping, rubbing his hands, and blowing into his nostrils. Name, T. Shellen, son of a small cobbler here, and recovered.

“May it please your Lordship, we make bold to apply, because you have been for a number of years, as far as the oldest can recollect, the Hero of our school, and

we are so bold as to ask the favour of General Lord Ormont's name to head a subscription we are making to circulate for the support of their sick mother, who has fallen ill. We think her a good woman. Gentlemen and ladies of the neighbourhood are willing to subscribe. If we have a great name to head the list, we think we shall make a good subscription. Names :—

“ Martha Mary Coop, mother.

“ Robert Coop.

“ Jane Coop, the girl, aged six.

“ If we are not taking too great a liberty, a subscription paper will follow. We are sure General the Earl of Ormont's name will help to make them comfortable.

“ We are obediently and respectfully,

“ DAVID GOWEN,

“ WALTER BENCH,

“ JAMES PANNERS PARSONS,

“ And seven others.”

Weyburn spared Aminta an answering look, that would have been a begging of Brownny to remember Matey.

"It's genuine," he said to Mrs. Lawrence, as he attacked his plate with the gusto for the repast previously and benignly observed by her. "It ought to be the work of some of the younger fellows."

"They spell correctly, on the whole."

"Excepting," said my lord, "an article they don't know much about yet."

Weyburn had noticed the word, and he smiled. "Said to be the happy state! The three signing their names are probably what we called bellman and beemen, collector, and heads of the swarm—enthusiasts. If it is not the work of some of the younger hands, the school has levelled on minors. In any case, it shows the school is healthy."

"I subscribe," said Mrs. Lawrence.

"The little girl aged six shall have

something done for her," said Aminta, and turned her eyes on the earl.

He was familiar with her thrilled voice at a story of bravery. He said—

"The boys don't say the girl's brother turned tail."

"Only that the girl's brother aged eight followed the lead of the little girl aged six," Mrs. Lawrence remarked. "Well, I like the schoolboys, too—'we are sorry to say!' But they're good lads. Boys who can appreciate brave deeds are capable of doing them."

"Speak to me about it on Monday," the earl said to Weyburn.

He bowed, and replied—

"I shall have the day to-morrow. I'll walk it and call on Messrs." (he glanced at the paper) "Gowen, Bench, and Parsons. I have a German friend in London anxious to wear his legs down stumpier."

"The name of the school?"

“ It is called Cuper’s.”

Aminta, on hearing the name of Cuper a second time, congratulated herself on the happy invention of her pretext to keep Mrs. Pagnell from the table at midday. Her aunt had a memory for names: what might she not have exclaimed! There would have been little in it, but it was as well that the “boy of the name of Weyburn” at Cuper’s should be unmentioned. By an exaggeration peculiar to a disgust in fancy, she could hear her aunt vociferating “Weyburn!” and then staring at Mr. Weyburn opposite—perhaps not satisfied with staring.

He withdrew after his usual hearty meal, during which his talk of boys and their monkey tricks, and what we can train them to, had been pleasant generally, especially to Mrs. Lawrence. Aminta was carried back to the minute early years at High Brent. A line or two of a smile touched her cheek.

“Yes, my dear countess, that is the face I want for Lady de Culme to-day,” said Mrs. Lawrence. “She likes a smiling face. Aunty-aunty has always been good; she has never been prim. I was too much for her, until I reflected that she was very old, and deserved to know the truth before she left us; and so I went to her; and then she said she wished to see the Countess of Ormont, because of her being my dearest friend. I fancy she entertains an *arrière* idea of proposing her flawless niece Gracey, Marchioness of Fencaster, to present you. She’s quite equal to the fatigue herself. You’ll rejoice in her anecdotes. People were virtuous in past days: they counted their sinners. In those days, too, as I have to understand, the men chivalrously bore the blame, though the women were rightly punished. Now, alas! the initiative is with the women, and men are not asked for chivalry. Hence it languishes. Lady de

Culme won't hear of the Queen of Blondes ; has forbidden her these many years ! ”

Lord Ormont, to whom the lady's prattle was addressed, kept his visage moveless, except in slight jerks of the brows.

“ What queen ? ”

“ You insist upon renewing my old, old pangs of jealousy, my dear lord ! The Queen of Cyprus, they called her, in the last generation ; she fights our great duellist handsomely.”

“ My dear Mrs. Lawrence ! ”

“ He triumphs finally, we know, but she beats him every round.”

“ It's only tattle that says the duel has begun.”

“ May is the month of everlasting beauty ! There's a widower marquis now who claims the right to cast the glove to any who dispute it.”

“ Mrs. May is too good-looking to escape from scandal.”

"Amy May has the good looks of the Immortals."

"She can't be thirty."

"In the calendar of women she counts thirty-four."

"Malignity! Her husband's a lucky man."

"The shots have proved it."

Lord Ormont nodded his head over the hopeless task of defending a woman from a woman, and their sharp interchange ceased. But the sight of his complacency in defeat told Aminta that he did not respect his fair client: it drew a sketch of the position he allotted his wife before the world side by side with this Mrs. Amy May, though a Lady de Culme was persuaded to draw distinctions.

He had, however, quite complacently taken the dose intended for him by Mrs. Lawrence, who believed that the system of gently forcing him was the good one.

The ladies drove away in the afternoon. The earl turned his back on manuscript. He sent for a couple of walking-sticks, and commanded Weyburn to go through his *parades*. He was no tyro, merely out of practice, and unacquainted with the later, simpler form of the great master of the French school, by which, at serious issues, the guarding of the line can be more quickly done: as, for instance, the *parade de septime* supplanting the slower *parade de prime*; the *parade de quarte* having advantage over the *parade de quinte*; the *parade de tierce* being readier and stronger than the *parade de sixte*; the same said for the *parade de seconde* instead of the weak *parade d'octave*.

These were then new points of instruction. Weyburn demonstrated them as neatly as he could do with his weapon.

"Yes, the French *think*," Lord Ormont said, grasping the stick to get conviction

of thumb-strength and finger-strength from the *parades* advocated ; “ their steel would thread the ribs of our louts before they could raise a cry of parry ; so here they’re pleased to sneer at fencing, as if it served no purpose but the duel. Fencing, for one thing, means that, with a good stick in his hand, a clever fencer can double up a giant or two, grant him choice of ground. Some of our men box ; but the sword’s the weapon for an officer, and precious few of ’em are fit for more than to kick the scabbard. Slashing comes easier to them : a plaguey cut, if it does cut—say, one in six. Navy too. Their cutlass-drill is like a woman’s fling of the arm to fetch a slap from behind her shoulder. Pinking beats chopping. These English ’ll have their lesson. It’s like what you call good writing : the simple way does the business, and that’s the most difficult to learn, because you must give your head to it, as those

French fellows do. *Trop de finesse* is rather their fault. Anything's better than loutishness. Well ! the lesson 'll come."

He continued. He spoke as he thought : he was not speaking what he was thinking. His mind was directed on the visit of Aminta to Lady de Culme, and the tolerably wonderful twist whereby Mrs. Lawrence Finchley had vowed herself to his girl's interests. And he blamed neither of them ; only he could not understand how it had been effected, for Aminta and Mrs. Lawrence had not been on such particularly intimate terms last week or yesterday. His ejaculation, "Women !" was, as he knew, merely ignorance roaring behind a mask of sarcasm. But it allied him with all previous generations on the male side, and that was its virtue. His view of the shifty turns of women got no further, for the reason that he took small account of the operations of the feelings, to the sole

exercise of which he by system condemned the sex.

He was also insensibly half a grain more soured by the homage of those poor school-boys, who called to him to take it for his reward in a country whose authorities had snubbed, whose Parliament had ignored, whose Press had abused him. The ridiculous balance made him wilfully oblivious that he had seen his name of late eulogized in articles and in books for the right martial qualities. Can a country treating a good soldier—not serving it for pay—in so scurvy a fashion, be struck too hard with our disdain? One cannot tell it in too plain a language how one despises its laws, its moralities, its sham of society. The Club, some choice anecdotists, two or three listeners to his dolences clothed as diatribes; a rubber, and the sight of his girl at home, composed, with a week's shooting now and then, his round of life now that she refused

to travel. What a life for a soldier in his vigour!

Weyburn was honoured by the earl's company on the walk to Chiallo's. In the street of elegant shops they met Lord Adderwood, and he, as usual, appeared in the act of strangling one of his flock of yawns, with gentlemanly consideration for the public. Exercise was ever his temporary specific for these incurables. Flinging off his coat, he cast away the cynic style engendering or engendered by them. He and Weyburn were for a bout. Sir John Randeller and Mr. Morsfield were at it, like Bull in training and desperado foiled. A French *maitre d'armes*, famed in *escrime*, standing near Captain Chiallo, looked amused in the eyes, behind a mask of professional correctness. He had come on an excursion for the display of his art. Sir John's very sturdy defence was pierced. Weyburn saluted the Frenchman as an ac-

quaintance, and they shook hands, chatted, criticized, nodded. Presently he and his adversary engaged, vizored and in their buckram, and he soon proved to be too strong for Adderwood, as the latter expected and had notified to Lord Ormont before they crossed the steel. My lord had a pleasant pricking excitement in the sound. There was a pretty display between Weyburn and the *escrimeur*, who neatly and kindly trifled, took a point and returned one, and at the finish complimented him. The earl could see that he had to be sufficiently alert.

Age mouthed an ugly word to the veteran insensible of it in his body, when a desire to be one with these pairs of nimble wrists and legs was like an old gamecock shown the pit and put back into the basket. He left the place, carrying away an image of the coxcombical attitudinizing of the man Morsfield at the *salut*, upon which he brought down his powers of burlesque.

My lord sketched the scene he had just quitted to a lady who had stopped her carriage. She was the still beautiful Mrs. Amy May, wife of the famous fighting captain. Her hair was radiant in a shady street; her eyelids tenderly toned round the almond enclosure of blue pebbles, bright as if shining from the seawash. The lips of the fair woman could be seen to say that they were sweet when, laughing or discoursing; they gave sight of teeth proudly her own, rivaling the regularity of the grin of dentistry. A Venus of nature was melting into a Venus of art, and there was a decorous concealment of the contest and the anguish in the process, for which Lord Ormont liked her well enough to wink benevolently at her efforts to cheat the world at various issues, and maintain her duel with Time. The world deserved that she should beat it, even if she had been all deception.

She let the subject of Mr. Morsfield pass

without remark from her, until the exhaustion of open-air topics hinted an end of their conversation, and she said—

“ We shall learn next week what to think of the civilians. I have heard Mr. Morsfield tell that he is *de première force*. Be on your guard. You are to know that I never forget a service, and you did me one once.”

“ You have reason . . . ? ” said the earl.

“ If anybody is the dragon to the treasure he covets he is a spadassin who won't hesitate at provocations. Adieu.”

Lord Ormont's eye had been on Mr. Morsfield. He had seen what Mrs. Pagnell counselled her niece to let him see. He thanked Mr. Morsfield for a tonic that made him young with anticipations of bracing; and he set his head to work upon an advance half-way to meet the gentleman, and safely exclude his wife's name.

Monday brought an account of Cuper's boys. Aminta received it while the earl was at his papers for the morning's news of the weightier deeds of men.

They were the right boys, Weyburn said ; his interview with Gowen, Bench, Parsons, and the others assured him that the school was breathing big lungs. Mr. Cuper, too, had spoken well of them.

"You walked the twenty miles?" Aminta interrupted him.

"With my German friend: out and home; plenty of time in the day. He has taken to English boys, but asks why enthusiasm and worship of great deeds don't grow upward from them to their elders. And I, in turn, ask why Germans insist on that point more even than the French do."

"Germans are sentimental. But the English boys he saw belonged to a school with traditions of enthusiasm sown by some one. The school remembered?"

"Curiously, Mr. Cuper tells me, the hero of the school has dropped and sprung up, stout as ever, twice—it tells me what I wish to believe—since Lord Ormont led their young heads to glory. He can't say how it comes. The tradition's there, and it's kindled by some flying spark."

"They remember who taught the school to think of Lord Ormont?"

"I'm a minor personage. I certainly did some good, and that's a push forward."

"They speak of you?"

It was Aminta more than the Countess of Ormont speaking to him.

"You take an interest in the boys?" he said, glowing. "Yes, well, they have their talks. I happened to be a cricketer, counting wickets and scores. I don't fancy it's remembered that it was I preached my lord. A day of nine wickets and one catch doesn't die out of a school. The boy Gowen was the prime spirit in getting up the subscrip-

tion for the laundress. But Bench and Parsons are good boys too."

He described them, dwelt on them. The enthusiast, when not lyrical, is perilously near to boring. Aminta was glad of Mrs. Lawrence's absence. She had that feeling because Matthew Weyburn would shun talk of himself to her, not from a personal sense of tedium in hearing of the boys; and she was quaintly reminded by suggestions, coming she knew not whence, of a dim likeness between her and these boys of the school when their hero dropped to nothing and sprang up again brilliantly—a kind of distant cousinship, in her susceptibility to be kindled by so small a flying spark as this one on its travels out of High Brent. Moreover, the dear boys tied her to her girlhood, and netted her fleeting youth for the moth-box. She pressed to hear more and more of them, and of the school-laundress Weyburn had called to see, and

particularly of the child, little Jane, aged six. Weyburn went to look at the sheet of water to which little Jane had given celebrity over the county. The girl stood up to her shoulders when she slid off the bank and made the line for her brother to hold, he in the water as well. Altogether, Cuper's boys were justified in promoting a subscription, the mother being helpless.

"Modest little woman," he said of Jane. "We'll hope people won't spoil her. Don't forget, Lady Ormont, that the brother did his part; he had more knowledge of the danger than she."

"You will undertake to convey our subscriptions? Lord Ormont spoke of the little ones and the schoolboys yesterday."

"I'll be down again among them next Sunday, Lady Ormont. On the Monday I go to Olmer."

"The girls of High Brent subscribe?"

There was a ripple under Weyburn's gravity.

"Messrs. Gowen, Bench, and Parsons thought proper to stop Miss Vincent at the head of her detachment in the park."

"On the Sunday?"

"And one of them handed her a paper containing a report of their interview with Mrs. Coop and a neat eulogy of little Jane. But don't suspect them, I beg. I believe them to be good, honest fellows. Bench, they say, is religious; Gowen has written verses; Parsons generally harum-scarum. They're boyish in one way or another, and that'll do. The cricket of the school has been low: seems to be reviving."

"Mr. Weyburn," said the countess, after a short delay—and Aminta broke through—"it pleases me to hear of them, and think they have not forgotten you, or, at least, they follow the lead you gave. I should like to know whether an idea I have

is true : Is much, I mean constant, looking down on young people likely to pull one's mind down to their level ? ”

“ Likely enough to betray our level, if there's danger,” he murmured. “ Society offers an example that your conjecture is not unfounded, Lady Ormont. But if we have great literature and an interest in the world's affairs, can there be any fear of it ? The schoolmaster ploughs to make a richer world, I hope. He must live with them, join with them in their games, accustom them to have their heads knocked with what he wants to get into them, leading them all the while, as the bigger school-fellow does, if he is a good fellow. He has to be careful not to smell of his office. Doing positive good is the business of his every day—on a small scale, but it's positive, if he likes his boys. Avaunt favouritism !—he must like all boys. And it's human nature not so far removed

from the dog ; only it's a supple human nature : there's the beauty of it. We train it. Nothing is more certain than that it will grow upward. I have the belief that I shall succeed, because I like boys, and they like me. It always was the case."

"I know," said Aminta.

Their eyes met. She looked moved at heart behind that deep forest of her chestnut eyes.

"And I think I can inspire confidence in fathers and mothers," he resumed. "I have my boys already waiting for me to found the school. I was pleased the other day : an English friend brought an Italian gentleman to see me and discuss my system, up at Norwood, at my mother's—a Signor Calliani. He was a nephew ; the parents dote on him. The uncle confesses that the boy wants—he has got hold of our word—'pluck.' We had a talk. He has promised

to send me the lad when I am established in Switzerland."

"When?" said Aminta.

"A relative from whom a Reversion comes is near the end. It won't be later than September that I shall go. My Swiss friend has the school, and would take me at once before he retires."

"You make friends wherever you go," said Aminta.

"Why shouldn't everybody? I'm convinced it's because I show people I mean well, and I never nurse an injury, great or small. And besides, they see I look forward. I do hope good for the world. If at my school we have all nationalities—French boys and German, Italian, Russian, Spaniard—without distinction of race and religion and station, and with English inter-mixing—English games, English sense of honour and conception of gentleman—we shall help to nationalize Europe. Émile

Grenat, Adolf Fleischer, and an Italian, Vincentino Chiuse, are prepared to start with me : and they are men of attainments ; they will throw up their positions ; they will do me the honour to trust to my leadership. It's not scaling Alps or commanding armies, true."

"It may be better," said Aminta, and thought as she spoke.

"Slow work, if we have a taste for the work, doesn't dispirit. Otherwise, one may say that an African or South American traveller has a more exciting time. I shall manage to keep my head on its travels."

"You have ideas about the education of girls ?"

"They can't be carried out unaided."

"Aid will come."

Weyburn's confidence, high though it was, had not mounted to that pitch.

"One may find a mate," he said. The

woman to share and practically to aid in developing such ideas is not easily found: that he left as implied.

Aminta was in need of poetry; but the young schoolmaster's plain, well-directed prose of the view of a business in life was welcome to her.

Lord Ormont entered the room. She reminded him of the boys of High Brent and the heroine Jane. He was ready to subscribe his five-and-twenty guineas, he said. The amount of the sum gratified Weyburn, she could see. She was proud of her lord, and of the boys and the little girl; and she would have been happy to make the ardent young schoolmaster aware of her growing interest in the young.

The night before the earl's departure on the solitary expedition to which she condemned him, he surprised her with a visit of farewell, so that he need not disturb her

in the early morning, he said. She was reading beside her open jewel-box, and she closed it with the delicate touch of a hand turned backward while listening to him, with no sign of nervousness.


CHAPTER V.

WAR AT OLMER.

LIVELY doings were on the leap to animate Weyburn at Olmer during Easter week. The Rev. Mr. Hampton-Evey, rector of Barborough, on hearing that Lady Charlotte Eglett was engaged in knocking at the doors of litigation with certain acts that constituted distinct breaches of the law and the peace, and were a violation of the rights of her neighbour, Mr. Gilbert Addicote, might hope that the troublesome parishioner whom he did not often number among his congregation would grant him a term of repose. Therein he was deceived. Alterations and enlargements of the church,

much required, had necessitated the brick-ing up of a door regarded by the lady as the private entrance to the Olmer pew. She sent him notice of her intention to batter at the new brickwork ; so there was the prospect of a pew-fight before him. But now she came to sit under him every Sunday ; and he could have wished her absent, for she diverted his thoughts from piety to the selection of texts applicable in the case of a woman who sat with arms knotted, and the frown of an intemperate schoolgirl forbidden speech ; while her pew's firelight startlingly at intervals danced her sinister person into view, as from below. The lady's inaccessible and unconquerable obtuseness to exhortation informed the picture with an evil spirit that cried for wrestlings.

Regularly every week-day she headed the war now raging between Olmer and Addicotes, on the borders of the estates.



It was open war, and herself to head the cavalry. Weyburn, driving up a lane in the gig she had sent to meet the coach, beheld a thicket of countrymen and boys along a ridge; and it swayed and broke, and through it burst the figure of a mounted warrior woman at the gallop, followed by what bore an appearance of horse and gun, minus carriage, drivers at the flanks cracking whips on foot. Off went the train, across a small gorse common, through a gate.

“That’s another down,” said his whip.

“Sound good wood it is, not made to fall. Her ladyship’s at it hard to-day. She’ll teach Mr. Addicote a thing or two about things females can do. That is, when they stand for their rights.”

He explained to Weyburn that Mr. Addicote, a yeoman farmer and a good hunting man, but a rare obstinate one, now learning his lesson from her ladyship, was

in dispute with her over rights of property on a stretch of fir-trees lining the ridge where the estates of Olmer and Addicotes met. Her ladyship had sworn that if he did not yield to her claim she would cut down every tree of the ridge and sell the lot for timber under his nose. She acted according to her oath, in the teeth of his men two feet across the border. All the world knew the roots of those trees were for the most part in Olmer soil, though Addicote shared the shade. All the people about mourned for the felling of those trees. All blamed Mr. Gilbert Addicote for provoking her ladyship, good hunting man though he was. But as to the merits of the question, under the magnifier of the gentlemen of the law, there were as many different opinions as wigs in the land.

“And your opinion?” said Weyburn.

To which the young groom answered :
“Oh, I don’t form an opinion, sir. I’m of

my mistress's opinion ; and if she says, Do it, think as we like, done it has to be."

Lady Charlotte came at a trot through the gate, to supervise the limbering-up of another felled tree. She headed it as before. The log dragged bounding and twirling, rattling its chains, the crowd along the ridge, forbidden to cheer, watching it with intense repression of the roar. We have not often in England sight of a great lady challenging an unpopular man to battle and smacking him in the face like this to provoke him. Weyburn was driven on a half-circle of the lane to the gate, where he jumped out to greet Lady Charlotte trotting back for another smack in the face of her enemy,—a third rounding of her Troy with the vanquished dead at her heels, as Weyburn let a flimsy suggestion beguile his fancy, until the Homeric was overwhelming even to a playful mind, and he put her in a mediæval frame. She really had the heroical

aspect in a grandiose-grotesque, fitted to some lines of Ariosto. Her head wore a close hood, disclosing a fringe of grey locks, owlsh to see about features hooked for action.

“Ah, you! there you are: good—I’ll join you in three minutes,” she sang out to him, and cantered to the ridge.

Hardly beyond the stated number she was beside him again, ranging her steed for the victim log to dance a gyration on its branches across the lane and enter a field among the fallen compeers. One of her men had run behind her. She slid from her saddle and tossed him the reins, catching up her skirts.

“That means war, as much as they’ll have it in England,” she said, seeing his glance at the logs. “My husband’s wise enough to leave it to me, so I save him trouble with neighbours. An ass of a Mr. Gilbert Addicote dares us to make good our

claim on our property, our timber, because half a score fir-tree roots go stretching on to his ground."

She swished her whip. Mr. Gilbert Addicote received the stroke and retired, a buried subject. They walked on at an even pace. "You'll see Leo to-morrow. He worships you. You may as well give him a couple of hours' coaching a day for the week. He'll be hanging about you, and you won't escape him. Well, and my brother Rowsley: how is Lord Ormont? He never comes to me now, since——Well, it's nothing to me; but I like to see my brother. She can't make any change here." Olmer and Lady Charlotte's bosom were both implied. "What do you think?—you've noticed: is he in good health? It's the last thing he'll be got to speak of."

Weyburn gave the proper assurances.

"Not he!" said she. "He's never ill. Men beat women in the long race, if they

haven't overdone it when young. My doctor wants me to renounce the saddle. He says it's time. Not if I've got work for horseback!" she nicked her head emphatically: "I hate old age. They sha'n't dismount me till a blow comes. Hate it! But I should despise myself if I showed signs, like a worm under heel. Let Nature do her worst; she can't conquer us as long as we keep up heart. You won't have to think of that for a good time yet. Now tell me why Lord Ormont didn't publish the *Plan for the Defence* you said he was writing; and he was, I know. He wrote it and he finished it; you made the fair copy. Well, and he read it,—there! see!" She took the invisible sheets in her hands and tore them. "That's my brother. He's so proud. It would have looked like asking the country, that injured him, to forgive him. I wish it had been printed. But whatever he does I admire. That—she

might have advised, if she'd been a woman of public spirit or cared for his reputation. He never comes near me. Did she read your copy?"

The question was meant for an answer.

Weyburn replied: "Lady Ormont had no sight of it."

"Ah! she's Lady Ormont to the servants, I know. She has an aunt living in the house. If my brother's a sinner, and there's punishment for him, he has it from that aunt. Pag . . . something. He bears with her. He's a Spartan. She's his pack on his back, for what she covers and the game he plays. It looks just tolerably decent with her in the house. She goes gabbling a story about our Embassy at Madrid. To preserve propriety, as they call it. Her niece doesn't stoop to any of those tricks, I'm told. I like her for that."

Weyburn was roused: "I think you

would like Lady Ormont, if you knew her, my lady."

"The chances of my liking the young woman are not in the dice-box. You call her Lady Ormont: you are not one of the servants. Don't call her Lady Ormont to me."

"It is her title, Lady Charlotte."

She let fly a broadside at him.

"You are one of the woman's dupes. I thought you had brains. How can you be the donkey not to see that my brother Rowsley, Lord Ormont, would never let a woman lawfully, bearing his name, go running the quadrille over London in couples with a Lady Staines and a Mrs. Lawrence Finchley, Lord Adderwood, and that man Morsfield, who boasts of your Lady Ormont, and does it unwhipped—tell me why? Pooh, you must be the poorest fool born to suppose it possible my brother would allow a man like that man Morsfield

to take his wife's name in his mouth a second time. Have you talked much with this young person?"

"With Lady Ormont? I have had the honour occasionally."

"Stick to the title and write yourself plush-breech. Can't you be more than a footman? Try to be a man of the world; you're old enough for that by now. I know she's good-looking; the whole tale hangs on that. You needn't be singing me mooncalf hymn tunes of 'Lady Ormont, Lady Ormont,' solemn as a parson's clerk; the young woman brought good looks to market; and she got the exchange she had a right to expect. But it's not my brother Rowsley's title she has got—except for footmen and tradesmen. When there's a true Countess of Ormont! . . . Unless my brother has cut himself from his family. Not he. He's not mad."

They passed through Olmer park-gates.

Lady Charlotte preceded him, and she turned, waiting for him to rejoin her. He had taken his flagellation in the right style, neither abashed nor at sham crow : he was easy, ready to converse on any topic ; he kept the line between supple courtier and sturdy independent ; and he was a pleasant figure of a young fellow. Thinking which, a reminder that she liked him drew her by the road of personal feeling, as usual with her, to reflect upon another, and a younger, woman's observing and necessarily liking him too.

"You say you fancy I should like the person you call Lady Ormont ?"

"I believe you would, my lady."

"Are her manners agreeable ?"

"Perfect ; no pretension."

"Ah ! she sings, plays—all that ?"

"She plays the harp and sings."

"You have heard her ?"

"Twice."

"She didn't set you mewling?"

"I don't remember the impulse; at all events, it was restrained."

"She would me; but I'm an old woman. I detest their squalling and strumming. I can stand it with Italians on the boards: they don't stop conversation. She was present at that fencing-match where you plucked a laurel? I had an account of it. I can't see the use of fencing in this country. Younger women can, I dare say. Now, look. If we're to speak of her, I can't call her Lady Ormont, and I don't want to hear you. Give me her Christian name."

"It is—" Weyburn found himself on a slope without a stay—"Aminta."

Lady Charlotte's eye was on him. He felt intolerably hot; his vexation at the betrayal of the senseless feeling made it worse, a conscious crimson.

"Aminta," said she, rather in the style


of Cuper's boys, when the name was a strange one to them. "I remember my Italian master reading out a poem when I was a girl. I read poetry then. You wouldn't have imagined that. I did, and liked it. I hate old age. It changes you so. None of my children know me as I was when I had life in me and was myself, and my brother Rowsley called me Cooeey. They think me a hard old woman. I was Cooeey through the woods and over the meadows and down stream to Rowsley. Old age is a prison wall between us and young people. They see a miniature head and bust, and think it a flattery—won't believe it. After I married I came to understand that the world we are in is a world to fight in, or under we go. But I pity the young who have to cast themselves off and take up arms. Young women above all."

Why had she no pity for Aminta?

Weyburn asked it of his feelings, and he had the customary insurgent reply from them.

“You haven’t seen Steignton yet,” she continued. “No place on earth is equal to Steignton for me. It’s got the charm. Here at Olmer I’m a mother and a grandmother—the ‘devil of an old woman’ my neighbours take me to be. She hasn’t been to Steignton either. No, and won’t go there, though she’s working her way round, she supposes. He’ll do everything for his ‘Aminta,’ but he won’t take her to Steignton. I’m told now she’s won Lady de Culme. That Mrs. Lawrence Finchley has dropped the curtesy to her great-aunt and sworn to be a good girl, for a change, if Lady de Culme will do the chaperon, and force Lord Ormont’s hand. My brother shrugs. There’ll be a nice explosion one day soon. Presented? The Court won’t have her. That I know for positive. If

she's pushed forward, she'll be bitterly snubbed. It's on the heads of those women—silly women! I can't see the game Mrs. Lawrence Finchley's playing. She'd play for fun. If they'd come to me, I'd tell them I've proof she's not the Countess of Ormont: positive proof. You look? I have it. I hold something; and not before,—(he may take his Aminta to Steignton, he may let her be presented, she may wear his name publicly, I say he's laughing at them, snapping his fingers at them louder and louder the more they seem to be pushing him into a corner, until—I know my brother Rowsley!—and, poor dear fellow! a man like that, the best cavalry general England ever had:—they'll remember it when there comes a cry for a general from India: that's the way with the English; only their necessities teach them to be just!)—he to be reduced to be out-manceuvring a swarm of women,—I



tell them, not before my brother Rowsley comes to me for what he handed to my care and I keep safe for him, will I believe he has made or means to make his Aminta Countess of Ormont."

They were at the steps of the house. Turning to Weyburn there, the inexhaustible Lady Charlotte remarked that their conversation had given her pleasure. Leo was hanging on to one of his hands the next minute. A small girl took the other. Philippa and Beatrice were banished damsels.

Lady Charlotte's breath had withered the aspect of Aminta's fortunes. Weyburn could forgive her, for he was beginning to understand her. He could not pardon "her brother Rowsley," who loomed in his mind incomprehensible, and therefore black. Once he had thought the great General a great man. He now regarded him as a mere soldier, a soured veteran; socially as

a masker and a trifler, virtually a callous angler playing his cleverly-hooked fish for pastime.

What could be the meaning of Lady Charlotte's "that man Morsfield, who boasts of your Lady Ormont, and does it unwhipped"?

Weyburn stopped his questioning, with the reflection that he had no right to recollect her words thus accurately.

The words, however, stamped Morsfield's doings and sayings and postures in the presence of Aminta with significance. When the ladies were looking on at the fencers, Morsfield's perfect coxcombry had been noticeable. He knew the art of airing a fine figure. Mrs. Lawrence Finchley had spoken of it, and Aminta had acquiesced; in the gravely simple manner of women who may be thinking of it much more intently than the vivacious prattler. Aminta confessed to an admiration of masculine

physical beauty: the picador, matador, of the Spanish ring called up an undisguised glow that English ladies show coldly when they condescend to let it be seen; as it were, a line or two of colour on the wintriest of skies. She might, after all, at heart be one of the leisured, jewelled, pretty-winged; the spending, never harvesting, world she claimed and sought to enter. And what a primitive world it was!—world of the glittering beast and the not too swiftly flying prey; the savage passions clothed in silk. Surely desire to belong to it writes us poor creatures. Mentally, she could hardly be maturer than the hero-worshipping girl in the procession of Miss Vincent's young seminarists. Probably so, but she carried magic. She was of the order of women who walk as the goddesses of old, bearing the gift divine. And, by the way, she had the step of the goddess. Weyburn repeated to himself the favourite

familiar line expressive of the glorious walk, and accused Lord Ormont of being in cacophonous accord with the perpetual wrong of circumstance, he her possessor, the sole person of her sphere insensible to the magic she bore ! So ran his thought.

The young man chose to conceive that he thought abstractedly. He was, in truth, often casting about for the chances of his meeting on some fortunate day the predestined schoolmaster's wife : a lady altogether praiseworthy for carrying principles of sound government instead of magic. Consequently, susceptible to woman's graces though he knew himself to be, Lady Ormont's share of them hung in the abstract for him. His hopes were bent on an early escape to Switzerland and his life's work.

Lady Charlotte mounted to ride to the battle daily. She talked of her brother Rowsley, and of "Aminta," and provoked

an advocacy of the Countess of Ormont, and trampled the pleas and defences to dust, much in the same tone as on the first day; sometimes showing a peep of sweet humaneness, like the ripe berry of a bramble, and at others rattling thunder at the wretch of a woman audacious enough to pretend to a part in her brother's title.

Not that she had veneration for titles. She considered them a tinsel, and the devotee on his knee-caps to them a lump for a kick. Adding: "Of course I stand for my class; and if we can't have a manlier people—and it's not likely in a country treating my brother so badly—well, then, let things go on as they are." But it was the pretension to a part in the name of Ormont which so violently offended the democratic aristocrat, and caused her to resent it as an assault on the family honour, by "a woman springing up

out of nothing"—i. e. a woman of no distinctive birth.

She was rational in her fashion; or Weyburn could at least see where and how the reason in her took a twist. The Rev. Mr. Hampton-Evey would not see it; he was, in charity to her ladyship, of a totally contrary opinion, he informed Weyburn. The laborious pastor and much-enduring Churchman met my lady's apologist as he was having a swing of the legs down the lanes before breakfast, and he fell upon a series of complaints, which were introduced by a declaration that "he much feared" her ladyship would have a heavy legal bill to pay for taking the law into her hands up at Addicotes.

Her ladyship might, if she pleased, he said, encourage her domestics and her husband's tenants and farm-labourers to abandon the church for the chapel, and go, as she had done and threatened to do

habitually, to the chapel herself; but to denounce the ritual of the Orthodox Church under the denomination of "barbarous," to say of the invoking supplications of the service, that they were—she had been heard to state it more or less publicly and repeatedly—suitable to abject ministers and throngs at the court of an Indian rajah, *that* he did not hesitate to term highly unbecoming in a lady of her station, subversive, and unchristian. The personal burdens inflicted on him by her ladyship he prayed for patience to endure. He surprised Weyburn in speaking of Lady Charlotte as "educated and accomplished." She was rather more so than Weyburn knew, and more so than was common among the great ladies of her time.

Weyburn strongly advised the reverend gentleman on having it out with Lady Charlotte in a personal interview. He sketched the great lady's combative cha-

racter on a foundation of benevolence, and stressed her tolerance for open dealing, and the advantage gained by personal dealings with her—after a mauling or two. His language and his illustrations touched an old-school chord in the Rev. Mr. Hampton-Evey, who hummed over the project, profoundly disrelishing the introductory portion.

“Do me the honour to call and see me to-morrow, after breakfast, before her ladyship starts for the fray on Addicote heights,” Weyburn said; “and I will ask your permission to stand by you. Her bark is terrific, we know; and she can bite, but there’s no venom.”

Finally, on a heave of his chest, Mr. Hampton-Evey consented to call, in the interests of peace.


Weyburn had said it must be “man to man with her, facing her and taking steps”; and, although the prospect was

unpleasant to repulsiveness, it was a cheerful alternative beside Mr. Hampton-Evey's experiences and anticipations of the malignant black power her ladyship could be when she was not faced.

"Let the man come," said Lady Charlotte. Her shoulders intimated readiness for him.

She told Weyburn he might be present—insisted to have him present. During the day Weyburn managed to slide in observations on the favourable reports of Mr. Hampton-Evey's work among the poor—emollient doses that irritated her to fret and paw, as at a checking of her onset.

In the afternoon the last disputed tree on the Addicotes' ridge was felled and laid in Olmer ground. Riding with Weyburn and the joyful Leo, she encountered Mr. Eglett and called out the news. He remarked, in the tone of philosophy proper



to a placable country gentleman obedient to government on foreign affairs: "Now for the next act. But no more horseback now, mind!"

She muttered of not recollecting a promise. He repeated the interdict. Weyburn could fancy seeing her lips from words of how she hated old age.

He had been four days at Olmer, always facing her, "man to man," in the matter of Lady Ormont, not making way at all, but holding firm, and winning respectful treatment. They sat alone in her private room, where, without prelude, she discharged a fiery squib at impudent hussies caught up to the saddle-bow of a hero for just a canter, and pretending to a permanent seat beside him.

"You have only to see Lady Ormont; you will admit the justice of her claim, my lady," said he; and as evidently he wanted a fight, she let him have it.

"You try to provoke me; you take liberties. You may call the woman Aminta, I've told you; you insult me when you call the woman by my family name."

"Pardon me, my lady: I have no right to call Lady Ormont Aminta."

"You've never done so, eh? Say!"

She had him at the edge of the precipice. He escaped by saying, "Her Christian name was asked the other day, and I mentioned it. She is addressed by me as Lady Ormont."

"And by her groom and her footman. They all do; it's the indemnity to that class of young woman. Her linendraper is Lady-Ormonting as you do. I took you for a gentleman. Let me hear you give her that title again, you shall hear her true one, that the world fits her with, from me."

The time was near the half-hour bell before dinner, the situation between them

that of the fall of the breath to fetch words electrical. She left it to him to begin the fight, and was not sorry that she had pricked him for it.

A footman entered the room, bearer of a missive for Mr. Weyburn. Lord Ormont's groom had brought it from London.

"Send in the man," said Lady Charlotte.

Weyburn read :—

"The Countess of Ormont begs Mr. Weyburn to return instantly. There has been an accident in his home. It may not be very serious. An arm—a shock to the system from a fall. Messenger informs her, fear of internal hæmorrhage. Best doctors in attendance."

He handed Lady Charlotte the letter. She humped at the first line, flashed across the remainder, and in a lowered voice asked—

"Sister in the house?"

"My mother," Weyburn said.

The groom appeared. He knew nothing. The Countess had given him orders to spare no expense on the road to Olmer, without a minute's delay. He had ridden and driven.

He looked worn. Lady Charlotte rang the bell for her butler. To him she said—

“See that this man has a good feed of meat, any pasty you have, and a bottle of port wine. He has earned a pipe of tobacco; make up a bed for him. Despatch at once any one of the stable-boys to Loughton—the Dolphin. Mr. Leeman there will have a chariot, fly, gig, anything, ready-horsed in three hours from now. See Empson yourself; he will put my stepper Mab to the light trap; no delay. Have his feed at Loughton. Tell Mrs. Maples to send up now, here, a tray, whatever she has, within five minutes—not later. A bottle of the Peace of Amiens Chambertin—Mr. Eglett's. You understand. Mrs.

Maples will pack a basket for the journey ; she will judge. Add a bottle of the Waterloo Bordeaux. Wait : a dozen of Mr. Eglett's cigars. Brisk with all the orders. Go."

She turned to Weyburn. "You pack your portmanteau faster than a servant will do it."

He ran up-stairs.

She was beside the tray to welcome and inspirit his eating, and she performed the busy butler's duty in pouring out wine for him. It was a toned old Burgundy, happy in the year of its birth, the grandest of instruments to roll the gambol-march of the Dionysiaca through the blood of this frame and sound it to the spirit. She spoke no word of his cause for departure. He drank, and he felt what earth can do to cheer one of her stricken children and strengthen the beat of a heart with a dread like a shot in it.

She, while he flew supporting the body of his most beloved to the sun of Life in brighter hope, reckoned the stages of his journey.

"Leeman at Loughton will post you through the night to Mersley. Wherever you bait, it is made known that you come from Olmer, and are one of us. That passes you on up to London. Where can Lord Ormont be now?"

"In Paris."

"Still in Paris? He leaves her. She did well to send as she did. You will not pay for the posting along the road."

"I will pay for myself—I have a purse," Weyburn said; and continued, "Oh, my lady, there is Mr. Hampton-Evey to-morrow morning: I promised to stand by him."

"I'll explain," said Lady Charlotte. "He shall not miss you. If he strips the parson and comes as a man and a servant

of the poor, he has nothing to fear. You've done? The night before my brother Rowsley's first duel I sat with him at supper and poured his wine out, and knew what was going to happen, didn't say a word. No use in talking about feelings. Besides, death is only the other side of the ditch, and one or other of us must go foremost. Now then, good-bye. Empson's waiting by this time. Mr. Eglett and Leo shall hear the excuses from me. Think of anything you may want, while I count ten."

She held his hand. He wanted her to be friendly to Lady Ormont, but could not vex her at the last moment, touched as he was by her practical kindness.

She pressed his hand and let it go.

CHAPTER VI.

OLD LOVERS NEW FRIENDS.

THE cottage inhabited by Weyburn's mother was on the southern hills over London. He reached it late in the afternoon. His mother's old servant, Martha, spied the roadway at the gate of the small square of garden. Her steady look without welcome told him the scene he would meet beyond the door, and was the dead in her eyes. He dropped from no height; he stood on a level with the blow. His apprehensions on the road had lowered him to meet it.

"Too late, Martha?"

"She's in heaven, my dear."

“She is lying alone?”

“The London doctor left half-an-hour back. She’s gone. Slipped, and fell, coming from her room, all the way down. She prayed for grace to see her son. She’ll watch over him, be sure. You’ll not find it lone and cold. A lady sits with it—Lady Ormont, they call her—a very kind lady. My mistress liked her voice. Ever since news of the accident, up to ten at night; and never eats or drinks more than a poor tiny bit of bread-and-butter, with a teacup.”

Weyburn went up-stairs.

Aminta sat close to the bedside in a darkened room. They greeted silently. He saw the white shell of the life that had flown; he took his mother’s hand and kissed it, and knelt, clasping it.

Fear of disturbing his prayer kept Aminta seated.

Death was a stranger to him. The still

warm, half-cold, nerveless hand smote the fact of things as they were through the prayer for things as we would have them. The vitality of his prayer was the sole light he had. It drew sustainment from the dead hand in his grasp, and cowered down to the earth claiming all we touch. He tried to summon vision of a soaring spirituality; he could not; his understanding and senses were too stricken. He prayed on. His prayer was as a little fountain, not rising high out of earth, and in the clutch of death; but its being it had from death, his love gave it food.

Prayer is power within us to communicate with the desired beyond our thirsts. The goodness of the dear good mother gone was in him for assurance of a breast of goodness to receive her, whatever the nature of the eternal secret may be. The good life gone lives on in the mind; the bad has but a life in the body, and that

not lasting,—it extends, dispreads, it worms away, it perishes. Need we more to bid the mind perceive through obstructive flesh the God who reigns, a devil vanquished?

Be certain that it is the pure mind we set to perceive. The God discerned in thought is another than he of the senses. And let the prayer be as a little fountain. Rising on a spout, from dread of the hollow below, the prayer may be prolonged in words begetting words, and have a pulse of fervour: the spirit of it has fallen after the first jet. That is the delirious energy of our craving, which has no life in our souls. We do not get to any heaven by renouncing the Mother we spring from; and when there is an eternal secret for us, it is best to believe that Earth knows, to keep near her, even in our utmost aspirations.

Weyburn still knelt. He was warned

to quit the formal posture of an exhausted act by the thought, that he had come to reflect upon how he might be useful to his boys in a like calamity.

Having risen, he became aware, that for some time of his kneeling Aminta's hand had been on his head, and they had raised their souls in unison. It was a soul's link. They gazed together on the calm, rapt features.

They passed from the room.

"I cannot thank you," he said.

"Oh, no ; I have the reason for gratitude," said she. "I have learnt to know and love her, and hope I may imitate when my time is near."

"She . . . at the last ?"

"Peacefully ; no pain. The breath had not left her very long before you came."

"I said I cannot ; but I must."

"Do not."

"Not in speech, then."

They went into the tasteful little sitting-room below, where the stillness closed upon them as a consciousness of loss.

"You have comforted her each day," he said.

"It has been my one happiness."

"I could not wish for better than for her to have known you."

"Say that for me. I have gained. She left her last words for you with me. They were love, love . . . pride in her son: thanks to God for having been thought worthy to give him birth."

"She was one of the noble women of earth."

"She was your mother. Let me not speak any more. I think I will now go. I am rarely given to these——"

The big drops were falling.

"You have not ordered your carriage?"

"It brings me here. I find my way home."

“ Alone ? ”

“ I like the independence.”

“ At night, too ! ”

“ Nothing harmed me. Now it is daylight. A letter arrived for you from High Brent this morning. I forgot to bring it. Yesterday two of your pupils called here. Martha saw them.”

Her naming of the old servant familiarly melted him.

“ You will not bear to hear praise or thanks.”

“ If I deserved them. I should like you to call on Dr. Buxton ; he will tell you more than we can. He drove with me the first day, after I had sent you the local doctor’s report. I had it from the messenger, his assistant.”

Weyburn knew Dr. Buxton’s address. He begged her to stay and take some nourishment ; ventured a remark on her wasted look.

"It is poor fare in cottages."

"I have been feeding on better than bread and meat," she said. "I should have eaten if I had felt appetite. My looks will recover, such as they are. I hope I have grown out of them; they are a large part of the bondage of women. You would like to see me safe into some conveyance. Go up-stairs for a few minutes; I will wait here."

He obeyed her. Passing from the living to the dead, from the dead to the living, they were united in his heart.

Her brevity of tone, and her speech, so practical upon a point of need, under a crisis of distress, reminded him of Lady Charlotte at the time of the groom's arrival with her letter.

Aminta was in no hurry to drive. She liked walking and looking down on London, she said.

"My friend and schoolmate, Selina

Collett, comes to me at Whitsuntide. We have taken a house on the Upper Thames, above Marlow. You will come and see us, if you can be persuaded to leave your boys. We have a boathouse, and a bathing-plank for divers. The stream is quiet there between rich meadows. It seems to flow as if it *thought*. I am not poetical; I tell you only my impression. You shall be a great deal by yourself, as men prefer to be."

"As men are forced to be—I beg!" said he. "Division is against my theories."

"We might help, if we understood one another, I have often fancied. I know something of your theories. I should much like to hear you some day on the scheme of the school in Switzerland, and also on the schoolmaster's profession. She whom we have lost was full of it, and spoke of it to me as much as her weakness would permit. The subject seemed to give her strength."

"She has always encouraged me," said Weyburn. "I have lost her, but I shall feel that she is not absent. She had ideas of her own about men and women."

"Some she mentioned."

"And about marriage."

"That too."

Aminta shook herself out of a sudden stupor.

"Her mind was very clear up to the last hour upon all the subjects interesting her son. She at one time regretted his not being a soldier, for the sake of his father's memory. Then she learned to think he could do more for the world as the school-master. She said you can persuade."

"We had our talks. She would have the reason, if she was to be won. I like no other kind of persuasion."

"I long to talk over the future school with you. That is, to hear your plans."

They were at the foot of the hill, in view of an inn announcing livery stables. She wished to walk the whole distance. He shook his head.

The fly was ready for her soon, and he begged to see her safe home. She refused, after taking her seat, but said: "At any other time. We are old friends. You will really go through the ceremony of consulting me about the school?"

He replied: "I am honoured."

"Ah, not to me," said Aminta. "We will be the friends we—— You will not be formal with me?—not from this day?"

She put out her hand. He took it gently. The dead who had drawn them together withheld a pressure.

Holding the hand, he said: "I shall crave leave of absence for some days."

"I shall see you on the day," said she.

"If it is your desire: I will send word."

"We both mourn at heart. We should be in company. Adieu."

Their hands fell apart. They looked. The old school-time was in each mind. They saw it as a shore-bank in grey outline across morning mist. Years were between; and there was a division of circumstance, more repelling than an abyss or the rush of deep wild waters.

Neither of them had regrets. Under their cloud, and with the grief they shared, they were as happy as two could be in recovering one another as friends.

On the day of the funeral Aminta drove to the spot where they had parted; she walked to the churchyard. She followed the coffin to its gravel-heap, wishing neither to see nor be seen, only that she might be so far attached to the remains of the dead; and the sense of blessedness she

had in her bowed simplicity of feeling was as if the sainted dead had cleansed and anointed her.

When the sods had been cast on, the last word spoken, she walked her way back, happy in being alone, unnoticed. She was grateful to the chief mourner for letting her go as she had come. That helped her to her sense of purification, the haven out of the passions, hardly less quiet than the repose into which the dear dead woman, his mother, had entered.

London lay beneath her. The might of the great hive hummed at the verge of her haven of peace without disturbing. There she had been what none had known of her: an ambitious girl, modest merely for lack of intrepidity; paralyzed by her masterful lord; aiming her highest at a gilt weathercock; and a disappointed creature, her breast a home of serpents; never herself. She thought and hoped

she was herself now. Alarm lest this might be another of her moods, victim of moods as she had latterly been, was a shadow armed with a dart playing round her to find the weak spot. It sprang from her acknowledged weakness of nature ; and she cast about for how to keep it outside her and lean on a true though a small internal support. She struck at her desires, to sound them.

They were yesterday for love ; partly for distinction, for a woman having beauty to shine in the sphere of beauty ; but chiefly to love and be loved, therefore to live. She had yesterday read letters of a man who broke a music from the word—about as much music as there is in a tuning-fork, yet it rang and lingered ; and he was not the magical musician. Now those letters were as dust of the road. The sphere of beauty was a glass lamp-globe for delirious moths. She had changed.

Belief in the real change gave her full view of the compliant coward she had been.

Her heart assured her she had natural courage. She felt that it could be stubborn to resist a softness. Now she cared no more for the hackneyed musical word; friendship was her desire. If it is not life's poetry, it is a credible prose; a land of low undulations instead of Alps; beyond the terrors and the deceptions. And she could trust her friend: he who was a singular constancy. His mother had told her of his preserving letters of a girl he loved when at school; and of his journeys to an empty house at Dover. That was past; but, as the boy, so the man would be in sincerity of feeling—trustworthy to the uttermost.

She mused on the friend. He was brave. She had seen how he took his blow, and sorrow as a sister, conquering emotion.

It was not to be expected of him by one who knew him when at school. Had he faults? He must have faults. She, curiously, could see none. After consenting to his career as a schoolmaster, and seeing nothing ludicrous in it, she endowed him with the young school-hero's reputation, beheld him with the eyes of the girl who had loved him—and burnt his old letters! bitterly regretted that she burnt his letters!—and who had applauded his contempt of ushers and master opposing his individual will and the thing he thought it right to do.

Musing thus, she turned a corner, on a sudden, in her mind, and ran against a mirror, wherein a small figure running up to meet her, grew large and nodded, with the laugh and eyes of Brownie. So little had she changed! The steadfast experienced woman rebuked that volatile, and some might say, faithless girl. But the girl had

her answer: she declared they were one and the same, affirmed that the years between were a bad night's dream, that her heart had been faithful, that he who conjures visions of romance in a young girl's bosom must always have her heart, as a crisis will reveal it to her. She had the volubility of the mettled Brownie of old, and was lectured. When she insisted on shouting "Matey! Matey!" she was angrily spurned and silenced.

Aminta ceased to recline in her carriage. An idea that an indolent posture fostered vapourish meditations, counselled her sitting rigidly upright and interestedly observing the cottages and merry gutter-children along the squat straight streets of a London suburb. Her dominant ultimate thought was, "I, too, can work!" Like her courage, the plea of a capacity to work appealed for confirmation to the belief which exists without demonstrated example; and as she

refrained from probing to the inner sources of that mental outcry, it was allowed to stand and remain among the convictions we store—wherewith to shape our destinies.

Childishly indeed, quite witlessly, she fell into a trick of repeating the name of Matthew Weyburn in her breast and on her lips, after the manner of Isabella Lawrence Finchley, when she had inquired for his Christian name, and went on murmuring it, as if sucking a new bonbon, with the remark : “ It sounds nice, it suits the mouth.” Little Selina Collett had told, Aminta remembered, how those funny boys at Cuper’s could not at first get the name ‘Aminta’ to suit the mouth, but went about making hideous faces in uttering it. She smiled at the recollection, and thought, up to a movement of her lips, one is not tempted to do that in saying Matthew Weyburn !

CHAPTER VII.

SHOWING A SECRET FISHED WITHOUT ANGLING.

THAT great couchant dragon of the devouring jaws and the withering breath, known as our London world, was in expectation of an excitement above yawns on the subject of a beautiful Lady Doubtful proposing herself, through a group of infatuated influential friends, to a decorous Court, as one among the ladies acceptable. The popular version of it sharpened the sauce by mingling romance and cynicism very happily; for the numerous cooks, when out of the kitchen, will furnish a piquant dish. Thus, a jewel-eyed girl of half

English origin (a wounded British officer is amiably nursed in a castle near the famous Peninsula battlefield, etc.), running wild down the streets of Seville, is picked up by Lord Ormont, made to discard her tambourine, brought over to our shores, and allowed the decoration of his name, without the legitimate adornment of his title. Discontented with her position after a time, she now pushes boldly to claim the place which will be most effective in serving her as a bath. She has, by general consent, beauty; she must, seeing that she counts influential friends, have witchery. Those who have seen her riding and driving beside her lord, speak of Andalusian grace, Oriental lustre, fit qualification for the fair slave of a notoriously susceptible old warrior.

She won a party in the widening gossip world; and enough of a party in the regent world to make a stream. Pretend-

ing to be the actual Countess of Ormont, though not publicly acknowledged as his countess by the earl, she had on her side the strenuous few who knew and liked her, some who were pleased compassionately to patronize, all idle admirers of a shadowed beautiful woman at bay, the devotees of any beauty in distress, and such as had seen, such as imagined they had seen, such as could paint a mental picture of a lady of imposing stature, persuasive appearance, pathetic history, and pronounce her to be unjustly treated, with a general belief that she was visible and breathing. She had the ready enthusiasts, the responsive sentimentalists, and an honest active minor number, of whom not every one could be declared perfectly unspotted in public estimation, however innocent under verdict of the courts of law.

Against her was the livid cloud-bank over a flowery field, that has not yet

spoken audible thunder : the terrible aggregate social woman, of man's creation, hated by him, dreaded, scorned, satirized, and nevertheless, upheld, esteemed, applauded : a mark of civilization, on to which our human society must hold as long as we have nothing humaner. She exhibits virtue, with face of waxen angel, with paw of desert beast, and blood of victims on it. Her fold is a genial climate and the material pleasures for the world's sheepy : worshipping herself, she claims the sanctification of a performed religion. She is gentle when unassailed, going her way serenely, with her malady in the blood. When the skin bears witness to it, she swallows an apothecary, and there is a short convulsion. She is refreshed by cutting off diseased inferior members : the superior betraying foul symptoms, she covers up and retains ; rationally, too, for they minister to her present existence, and she lives all in the

present. Her subjects are the mixed subservient; among her rebellious are earth's advanced, who have a cold morning on their foreheads, and these would not dethrone her, they would but shame and purify by other methods than the druggist. She loves nothing. Undoubtedly, she dislikes the vicious. On that merit she subsists.

The vexatious thing in speaking of her is, that she compels to the use of the rhetorician's brass instrument. As she is one of the Powers giving life and death, one may be excused. This tremendous queen of the congregation has brought discredit on her sex for the scourge laid on quivering female flesh, and for the flippant indifference shown to misery and to fine distinctions between right and wrong, good and bad; and particularly for the indiscriminating hardness upon the starved of women. We forget her having been con-

ceived in the fear of men, shaped to gratify them. She is their fiction of the state they would fain beguile themselves to suppose her sex has reached, for their benefit; where she may be queen of it in a corner, certain of a loyal support, if she will only give men her half-the-world's assistance to uplift the fabric comfortable to them; together with assurance of paternity, ease of mind in absence, exclusive possession, enormous and minutest, etc.; not by any means omitting a regimental orderliness, from which men are privately exempt, because they are men, or because they are grown boys—the brisker at lessons after a vacation or a truancy, says the fiction.

In those days the world had oscillated, under higher leading than its royal laxity, to rigidity. Tiny peccadilloes were no longer matter of jest, and the sinner exposed stood *sola* to receive the brand. A beautiful Lady Doubtful needed her

husband's countenance if she was to take one of the permanent steps in public places. The party of Lady Charlotte Eglett called on the livid cloud-bank aforesaid to discharge celestial bolts and sulphur on the head of an impudent, underbred, ambitious young slut, whose arts had bewitched a distinguished nobleman not young in years at least, and ensnared the remainder wits of some principal ancient ladies of the land. Professional Puritans, born conservatives, malicious tattlers, made up a goodly tail to Lady Charlotte's party. The epithet unbred was accredited upon the quoted sayings and doings of the pretentious young person's aunt, repeated abroad by noblemen and gentlemen present when she committed herself; and the same were absurd. They carried a laugh, and so they lived and circulated. Lord Ormont submitted to the infliction of that horrid female in his household! It was no wonder he

stopped short of allying himself with the family.

Nor was it a wonder that the naturally enamoured old warrior or invalided Mars (for she had the gift of beauty) should deem it prudent to be out of England when she and her crazy friends determined on the audacious move. Or put it the other way—for it is just as confounding right side or left—she and her friends had taken advantage of his absence to make the clever push for an establishment, and socially force him to legalize their union on his return. The deeds of the preceding reign had bequeathed a sort of legendary credence to the wildest tales gossip could invent under a demurer.

But there was the fact, the earl was away. Lady Charlotte's party buzzed everywhere. Her ladyship had come to town to head it. Her ladyship laid trains of powder from dinner-parties, balls, routs,

park-processions, into the Lord Chamberlain's ear, and fired and exploded them, deafening the grand official. Do you consider that virulent Pagan Goddesses and the flying torch-furies are extinct? Error of Christians! We have relinquished the old names and have no new ones for them; but they are here, inextinguishable, threading the day and night air with their dire squib-trail, if we would but see. Hissing they go, and we do not hear. We feel the effects.

Upon the counsel of Mrs. Lawrence, Aminta sent a letter to Lord Ormont at his hotel in Paris, informing him of the position of affairs. He had delayed his return, and there had been none of his brief communications.

She wrote, as she knew, as she felt, coldly. She was guided by others, and her name was up before the world, owing to some half-remembered impulsion of

past wishes, but her heart was numbed; she was not a woman to have a wish without a beat of the heart in it. For her name she had a feeling, to be likened rather to the losing gambler's contemplation of a big stake he has flung, and sees it gone while fortune is undecided; and he catches at a philosophy nothing other than his hug of a modest little background pleasure, that he has always preferred to this accursed bad habit of gambling with the luck against him. Reckless in the cast, she was reckless of success.

Her letter was unanswered.

Then, and day by day more strongly, she felt for her name. She put a false heart into it. She called herself to her hearing the Countess of Ormont, and designed to consult the most foolish friend she could have chosen—her aunt; and even listened to her advice, that she should run about knocking at all the doors open

to her, and state her case against the earl. It seemed the course to take, the moment for taking it. Was she not asked if she could now at last show she had pride? Her pride ran stinging through her veins, like a band of freed prisoners who head the rout to fire a city. She charged her lord with having designedly — oh! cunningly indeed — left her to be the prey of her enemies at the hour when he knew it behoved him to be her great defender. There had been no disguise of the things in progress: they had been spoken of allusively, quite comprehensibly, after the fashion common with two entertaining a secret semi-hostility on a particular subject; one of them being the creature that blushes and is educated to be delicate, reserved, and timorous. He was not ignorant, and he had left her, and he would not reply to her letter!

So fell was her mood, that an endeavour

to conjure up the scene of her sitting beside the death-bed of Matthew Weyburn's mother, failed to sober and smooth it, holy though that time was. The false heart she had put into the pride of her name was powerfuller than the heart in her bosom. But to what end had the true heart counselled her of late? It had been a home of humours and languors, an impotent insurgent, the sapper of her character; and as we see in certain disorderly States a curative incendiarism usurp the functions of the sluggish citizen, and the work of re-establishment done by destruction, in peril of a total extinction, Aminta's feverish anger on behalf of her name went a stretch to vivify and give her dulled character a novel edge. She said good-bye to cowardice. "I have no husband to defend me—I must do it for myself." The peril of a too complete exercise of independence was just intimated to her

perceptions. On whom the blame? And let the motively guilty go mourn over consequences! That Institution of Marriage was eyed. Is it not a halting step to happiness? It is the step of a cripple; and one leg or the other poses for the feebler sex,—small is the matter which! And is happiness our cry? Our cry is rather for circumstance and occasion to use our functions, and the conditions are denied to women by Marriage—denied to the luckless of women, who are many, very many: denied to Aminta, calling herself Countess of Ormont, for one; denied to Mrs. Lawrence Finchley for another, and in a base bad manner. She had defended her good name triumphantly, only to enslave herself for life or snatch at the liberty which besmirches.

Reviewing Mrs. Lawrence, Aminta's real heart pressed forward at the beat, in tender pity of the woman for whom a yielding

to love was to sin; and unwomanly is the woman who does not love: men will say it! Aminta found herself phrasing, "Why was she unable to love her husband?—he is not old." She hurried in flight from the remark to confidences imparted by other ladies, showing strange veins in an earthy world; after which, her mind was bent to rebuke Mrs. Pagnell for the silly soul's perpetual allusions to Lord Ormont's age. She did not think of his age. But she was vividly thinking that she was young. Young, married, loveless, cramped in her energies, publicly dishonoured—a Lady Doubtful, courting one friend whom she liked among women, one friend whom she respected among men; that was the sketch of her.

That was in truth the outline, as much as Aminta dared sketch of herself without dragging her down lower than her trained instinct would bear to look. Our civiliz-

ation shuns nature; and most shuns it in the most artificially civilized, to suit the market. They, however, are always close to their mother nature, beneath their second nature's mask of custom; and Aminta's unconscious concluding touch to the sketch: "My husband might have helped me to a footing in Society," would complete it as a coloured picture, if writ in tones.

She said it, and for the footing in Society she had lost her taste.

Mrs. Lawrence brought the final word from high quarters: that the application must be deferred until Lord Ormont returned to town. It was known before, that such would be the decision. She had it from the eminent official himself, and she kicked about the room, setting her pretty mouth and nose to pout and sniff, exactly like a boy whose chum has been mishandled by a bully.

“Your dear good man is too much for us. I thought we should drive him. *C'est un rusé homme de guerre.* I like him, but I could slap him. He stops the way. Upon my word, he seems tolerably careless of his treasure. Does he suppose Mrs. Paggy is a protection? Do you know she's devoted to that man Morsfield? He listens to her stories. To judge by what he shouts aloud, he intends carrying you off the first opportunity, divorcing, and installing you in Cobeck Hall. All he fears is, that your lord won't divorce. You should have seen him the other day; he marched up and down the room, smacking his head and crying out: ‘Legal measures or any weapons her husband pleases!’ For he has come to believe that the lady would have been off with him long before, if her lord had no claim to the marital title. ‘It's that husband I can't get over! that husband!’ He reminded me, to the life,

of Lawrence Finchley with a headache the morning after a supper, striding, with his hand on the shining middle of his head : 'It's that Welsh rabbit ! that Welsh rabbit !' He has a poor digestion, and he will eat cheese. The Welsh rabbit chased him into his bed. But listen to me, dear, about your Morsfield. I told you he was dangerous."

. "He is not my Morsfield," said Aminta.

"Beware of his having a tool in Paggy. He boasts of letters."

"Mine ? Two ; and written to request him to cease writing to me."

"He stops at nothing. And, oh, my Simplicity ! don't you see you gave him a step in begging him to retire ? Morsfield has lived a good deal among our neighbours, who expound the physiology of women. He anatomizes us ; pulls us to pieces, puts us together, and then animates us with a breath of his 'passion'—sincere upon

every occasion, I don't doubt. He spared me, although he saw I was engaged. Perhaps it was because I'm of no definite colour. Or he thought I was not a receptacle for 'passion.' And quite true,—Adder, the dear good fellow, has none. Or where should we be? On a Swiss Alp, in a chalet, he shooting chamois, and I milking cows, with *ah-ahio, ah-ahio*, all day long, and a quarrel at night over curds and whey. Well, and that's a better old pensioner's limp to his end for 'passion' than the foreign hotel bell rung mightily, and one of the two discovered with a dagger in the breast, and the other a *don't-look* lying on the pavement under the window. Yes, and that's better than 'passion' splitting and dispersing upon new adventures, from habit, with two sparks remaining of the fire."

Aminta took Mrs. Lawrence's hands.
"Is it a lecture?"

She was kissed. "Frothy gabble. I'm really near to 'passion' when I embrace you. You're the only one I could run away with; live with all alone, I believe. I wonder men can see you while that silly lord of yours is absent, and not begin Morsfielding. They're virtuous if they resist. Paggy tells the world . . . well?"

Aminta had reddened. "What does my aunt tell the world?"

Mrs. Lawrence laid her smoothing hand absently on a frill of lace fichu above a sternly disciplined bosom at half-heave. "I think I can judge now that you're not much hurt by this wretched business of the presentation. The little service I could do was a moral lesson to me on the subject of deuce-may-care antecedents. My brother Tom, too, was always playing truant, as a boy. It's in the blood."

She seemed to be teasing, and Aminta

cried: "My aunt! Let me hear. She tells the world——?"

"Paggy? ah, yes. Only that she says the countess has an exalted opinion of Mr. Secretary's handwriting—as witnessed by his fair copy of the Memoirs, of course."

"Poor woman! How can she talk such foolishness! I guessed it."

"You wear a dark red rose when you're guessing, *ma mie*,—French for, my Aminta."

"But consider, Isabella, Mr. Weyburn has just had the heaviest of losses. My aunt should spare mention of him."

"Matthew Weyburn! we both like the name." Mrs. Lawrence touched at her friend and gazed. "I've seen it on certain evenings—crimson over an olive sky. What it forebodes, I can't imagine; but it's the end of a lovely day. They say it threatens rain, if it begins one. It's an ominous herald."

"You make me," said Aminta. "I must redden if you keep looking at me so closely."

"Now frown one little bit, please. I love to see you. I love to see a secret disclose itself ingenuously."

"But what secret, my dear?" cried Aminta's defence of her innocence; and she gave a short frown.

"Have no fear. Mr. Secretary is not the man to be Morsfielding. And he can enjoy his repast; a very good sign. But is he remaining long?"

"He is going soon, I hear."

"He's a good boy. I could have taken to him myself, and not dreaded a worrying. There's this difference between you and me, though, my Aminta; one of us has the fire place prepared for what's-his-name—'passion.' Kiss me. How could you fancy you were going to have a woman for your friend and keep hidden from her

any one of the secrets that blush! and with Paggy to aid! I am sure it means very little. Admiration for good handwriting is——” a smile broke the sentence.

“ You’re astray, Isabella.”

“ Not I, dear, I’m too fond of you.”

“ You read what is not.”

“ What is not yet written, you mean.”

“ What never could be written.”

“ I read what is in the blood, and comes out to me when I look. That lord of yours should take to study you as I have done ever since I fell in love with you. He’s not counselling himself well in keeping away.”

“ Now you speak wisely,” said Aminta.

“ Not a particle more wisely. And the reason is close at hand—see. You are young, you attract—how could it be otherwise?—and you have ‘passion’ sleeping, and likely to wake with a spring whether roused or not. In my observation good-

man t'other fellow—the poet's friend—is never long absent when the time is ripe—at least, not in places where we gather together. Well, one is a buckler against the other: I don't say with lovely Amy May,—with an honourable woman. But Aminta can smell powder and grow more mettlesome. Who can look at you and be blind to passion sleeping! The sight of you makes me dream of it—me, a woman, cool as a wine-cellar or a well. So there's to help you to know yourself and be on your guard. I know I'm not deceived, because I've fallen in love with you, and no love can be without jealousy, so I have the needle in my breast, that points at any one who holds a bit of you. Kind of sympathetic needle to the magnet behind anything. You'll know it, if you don't now. I should have felt the thing without the aid of Paggy. So, then, imagine all my nonsense unsaid, and squeeze a

drop or two of *sirop de bon conseil* out of it, as if it were your own wise meditations." The rest of Mrs. Lawrence's discourse was a swallow's wing skimming the city stream. She departed, and Aminta was left to beat at her heart and ask whether it had a secret.

But if there was one, the secret was out, and must have another name. It had been a secret for her until she heard her friend speak those pin-points that pricked her heart, and sent the blood coursing over her face, like a betrayal, so like as to resemble a burning confession.

But if this confessed the truth, she was the insanest of women. No woman could be surer that she had her wits. She had come to see things, previously mysteries, with surprising clearness. As, for example, that passion was part of her nature; therefore her very life, lying tranced. She certainly could not love without passion:

such an abandonment was the sole justification of love in a woman standing where she stood. And now for the first time she saw her exact position before the world; and she saw some way into her lord: saw that he nursed a wound, extracted balm from anything enabling him to show the world how he despised it, and undesigningly immolated her for the petty gratification.

It could not, in consequence, be the truth. She was passionless. Once it was absolutely true. She swam away to the golden-circled Island of Once; landed, and dwelt there solitarily and blissfully, looking forward to Sunday's walk round the park, looking back on it. Proudly she could tell herself that her dreams of the Prince of the Island had not been illusions as far as he was concerned; for he had a great soul. He did not aim at a tawdry glory. He was a loss to our army—no loss to his country or the world.

A woman might clasp her feeling of pride in having foreseen distinction for him; and a little, too, in distinguishing now the true individual distinction from the feathered uniform vulgar. Where the girl's dreams had proved illusions, she beheld in a title and luxuries, in a loveless marriage.

That was perilous ground. Still it taught her to see that the substantial is the dust; and passion not being active, she could reflect. After a series of penetrative flashes, flattering to her intelligence the more startling they were, reflection was exhausted. She sank on her nature's desire to join or witness agonistic incidents, shocks, wrestlings, the adventures which are brilliant air to sanguine energies. Imagination shot up, and whirled the circle of a succession of them; and she had a companion and leader, unfeatured, reverently obeyed, accepted as not to be known,

not to be guessed at, in the deepest hooded inmost of her being speechlessly divined.

The sudden result of Aminta's turmoil was a determination that she must look on Steignton. And what was to be gained by that? She had no idea. And how had she stopped her imaginative flight with the thought of looking on Steignton? All she could tell was, that it would close a volume. She could not say why the volume must be closed.

Her orders for the journey down to Steignton were prompt. Mrs. Pagnell had an engagement at the house of Lady Staines for the next day to meet titles and celebrities, and it precluded her comprehension of the project. She begged to have the journey postponed. She had pledged her word, she said.

"To Mr. Morsfield?" said Aminta.

Her aunt was astounded.

"I did tell him we should be there, my dear."

"He appears to have a pleasure in meeting you."

"He is one of the real gentlemen of the land."

"You correspond with him?"

"I may not be the only one."

"Foolish aunty! How can you speak to me in that senseless way?" cried Aminta. "You know the schemer he is, and that I have no protection from his advances unless I run the risk of bloodshed."

"My dear Aminta, whenever I go into society, and he is present, I know I shall not be laughed at, or fall into that pit of one of their dead silences, worse for me to bear than titters and faces. It is their way of letting one feel they are of birth above us. Mr. Morsfield—purer blood than many of their highest titles—is always

polite, always deferential ; he helps me to feel I am not quite out of my element in the sphere I prefer. We shall be travelling alone ?”

“Have you any fear ?”

“Not if nothing happens. Might we not ask that Mr. Weyburn ?”

“He has much work to do. He will not long be here. He is absent to-day.”

Mrs. Pagnell remarked : “I must say he earns his money easily.”

Aminta had softened herself with the allusion to the shortness of his time with them. Her aunt’s coarse hint, and the thought of his loss, and the banishment it would be to her all the way to Steignton, checked a sharp retort she could have uttered, but made it necessary to hide her eyes from sight. She went to her bedroom, and flung herself on the bed. Even so little as an unspoken defence of him shook her to floods of tears.

CHAPTER VIII.

ALONG TWO ROADS TO STEIGNTON.

UNACCOUNTABLE resolutions, if impromptu and springing from the female breast, are popularly taken for caprices ; and even when they divert the current of a history, and all the more when they are very small matters producing a memorable crisis. In this way does a lazy world consign discussion to silence with the cynical closure. Man's hoary shrug at a whimsy sex is the reading of his enigma still.

But ask if she has the ordinary pumping heart in that riddle of a breast ; and then, as the organ cannot avoid pursuit, we may get hold of it, and succeed in spelling out

that she is consequent, in her fashion. She is a creature of the apparent moods and shifts and tempers only because she is kept in narrow confines, resembling, if you like, a wild cat caged. Aminta's journey down to Steignton turned the course of other fortunes besides her own; and she disdained the minor adventure it was, while dreaming it important; and she determined eagerly on going, without wanting to go; and it was neither from a sense of duty nor in a spirit of contrariety that she went. Nevertheless, with her heart in hand, her movements are traceably as rational as a soldier's before the enemy or a trader's matching his customer.

The wish to look on Steignton had been spoken or sighed for during long years between Aminta and her aunt, until finally shame and anger clinched the subject. To look on Steignton for once was now Aminta's phrasing of her sudden resolve;

it appeared as a holiday relief from recent worries, and it was an expedition with an aim, though she had but the coldest curiosity to see the place, and felt alien to it. Yet the thought, never to have seen Steignton ! roused phantoms of dead wishes to drive the strange engine she was, faster than the living would have done. Her reason for haste was rationally founded on the suddenness of her resolve, which, seeing that she could not say she desired to go, seemed to come of an external admonition ; and it counselled quick movements, lest her inspired obedience to the prompting should as abruptly breathe itself out. " And in that case I shall never have seen Steignton at all," she said, with perfect calmness, and did not attempt to sound her meaning.

She did know that she was a magazine of a great storage of powder. It banked inoffensively dry. She had forgiven her lord, owning the real nobleman he was in

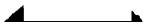
courtesy to women, whom his inherited ideas of them so quaintly minimized and reduced to pretty insect or tricky reptile. They, too, had the choice of being ultimately the one or the other in fact ; the latter most likely.

If, however, she had forgiven her lord, the shattering of their union was the cost of forgiveness. In letting him stand high, as the lofty man she had originally worshipped, she separated herself from him, to feel that the humble *she* was of a different element, as a running water at a mountain's base. They are one in the landscape ; they are far from one in reality. Aminta's pride of being chafed at the yoke of marriage.

Her aunt was directed to prepare for a start at an early hour the next morning. Mrs. Pagnell wrote at her desk, and fussed, and ordered the posting-chariot, and bewailed herself submissively ; for it was the Countess of Ormont speaking when Aminta

delivered commands, and the only grievance she dared to mutter was "the unexpectedness." Her letters having been despatched, she was amazed in the late evening to hear Aminta give the footman orders for the chariot to be ready at the door an hour earlier than the hour previously appointed. She remonstrated. Aminta simply observed that it would cause less inconvenience to all parties. A suspicion of her aunt's proceedings was confirmed by the good woman's flustered state. She refrained from smiling.

She would have mustered courage to invite Matthew Weyburn as her escort, if he had been at hand. He was attending to his affairs with lawyers—mainly with his friend Mr. Abner. She studied map and gazetteer till late into the night. Giving her orders to the postillion on the pavement in the morning, she named a south-westerly direction out of London, and after entering



the chariot, she received a case from one of the footmen.

"What is that, my dear?" said Mrs. Pagnell.

Aminta unlocked and laid it open. A pair of pistols met Mrs. Pagnell's gaze.

"We sha'n't be in need of those things?" the lady said anxiously.

"One never knows, on the road, aunt."

"Loaded? You wouldn't hesitate to fire, I'm sure."

"At Mr. Morsfield himself, if he attempted to stop me."

Mrs. Pagnell withdrew into her astonishment, and presently asked, in a tone of some indignation: "Why did you mention Mr. Morsfield, Aminta?"

"Did you not write to him yesterday afternoon, aunt?"

"You read the addresses on my letters!"

"Did you not supply him with our proposed route and the time for starting?"

“Pistols !” exclaimed Mrs. Pagnell, “One would fancy you think we are in the middle of the last century. Mr. Morsfield is a gentleman, not a highwayman.”

“He gives the impression of his being a madman.”

“The real madman is your wedded husband, Aminta, if wedding it was !”

It was too surely so, in Aminta's mind. She tried, by looking out of the window, to forget her companion. The dullness of the roads and streets opening away to flat fields combined with the postillion's unvarying jog to sicken her thoughts over the exile from London she was undergoing, and the chance that Matthew Weyburn might call at a vacant house next day, to announce his term of service to the earl, whom he had said he much wanted to see. He said it in his sharp manner when there was decision behind it. Several times after contemplating the end of her journey, and not

perceiving any spot of pleasure ahead, an emotion urged her to turn back; for the young are acutely reasoning when their breasts advise them to quit a road where no pleasure beckons.

Unlike Matthew Weyburn, the tiptoe sparkle of a happy mind did not leap from her at wayside scenes: a sweep of grass, distant hills, clouds in flight. She required, since she suffered, the positive of events or blessings to kindle her glow.

Matthew Weyburn might call at the house. Would he be disappointed? He had preserved her letters of the old school-days. She had burnt his. But she had not burnt the letters of Mr. Morsfield; and she cared nothing for that man. Assuredly she merited the stigma branding women as crack-brained. Yet she was not one of the fools; she could govern a household, and she liked work, she had the capacity for devotedness. So, therefore, she was a

woman perverted by her position, and she shook her bonds in revolt from marriage. Imagining a fall down some suddenly spied chasm of her nature, she had a sisterly feeling for the women named sinful. At the same time, reflecting that they are sinful only with the sinful, she knelt thankfully at the feet of the man who had saved her from such danger. Tears threatened. They were a poor atonement for the burning of his younger letters. But not he—she was the sufferer, and she whipped up a sensation of wincing at the flames they fell to, and at their void of existence, committing sentimental idiocies worthy of a lovesick girl, consciously to escape the ominous thought, which her woman's perception had sown in her, that he too chafed at a marriage no marriage: was true in fidelity, not true through infidelity, as she had come to be. The thought implied misery for both. She entered a black

desolation, with the prayer that he might not be involved, for his own sake: partly also on behalf of the sustaining picture the young schoolmaster at his task, merry among his dear boys, to trim and point them, body and mind, for their business in the world, painted for her weariful prospect of the life she must henceforth drag along.

Is a woman of the plain wits common to numbers ever deceived in her perception of a man's feelings for her? Let her first question herself whether she respects him. If she does not, her judgement will go easily astray, intuition and observation are equally at fault, she has no key; he has charmed her blood, that is all. But if she respects him, she cannot be deceived; respect is her embrace of a man's character. Aminta's vision was clear. She had therefore to juggle with the fact revealed, that she might keep her heart from rushing out; and the process was a disintegration of her

feminine principle of docility under the world's decrees. At each pause of her mental activity she was hurled against the state of marriage. Compassion for her blameless fellow in misery brought a deluge to sweep away all institutions and landmarks.

But supposing the blest worst to happen, what exchange had she to bestow? Her beauty? She was reputed beautiful. It had made a madman of one man; and in her poverty of endowments to be generous with, she hovered over Mr. Morsfield like a cruel vampire, for the certification that she had a much-prized gift to bestow upon his rival.

But supposing it: she would then be no longer in the shiny garden of the flowers of wealth; and how little does beauty weigh as an aid to an active worker in the serious fighting world! She would be a kind of potted rose-tree under his arm, of which he must eventually tire.

A very cold moment came, when it seemed that even the above supposition, in the case of a woman who has been married, is shameful to her, a sin against her lover, and should be obliterated under floods of scarlet. For, if she has pride, she withers to think of pushing the most noble of men upon his generosity. And, further, if he is not delicately scrupulous, is there not something wanting in him ? The very cold wave passed, leaving the sentence : better dream of being plain friends.

Mrs. Pagnell had been quietly chewing her cud of the sullens, as was the way with her after a snub. She now resumed her gossip of the naughty world she knelt to and expected to see some day stricken by a bolt from overhead ; containing, as it did, such wicked members as that really indefensible brazen Mrs. Amy May, who was only the daughter of a half-pay naval captain, and the Marquis of Colleston, who

would, they say, decorate her with his title to-morrow, if her husband were but somewhere else. She spread all sorts of reports about Mr. Morsfield, and he was honour itself in his reserve about her. "Depend upon it, Aminta—he was not more than a boy then, and they say she aimed at her enfranchisement by plotting the collision, for his Yorkshire revenues are immense, and he is, you know, skilful in the use of arms, and Captain May has no resources whatever: penury! no one cares to speculate how they contrive!—but while that dreadful duelling—and my lord as bad as any in his day—exists, depend upon it, an unscrupulous good-looking woman has as many lives for her look of an eye or lift of a finger as a throned Ottoman Turk on his divan."

Aminta wished to dream. She gave her aunt a second dose, and the lady relapsed again.

Power to dream had gone. She set herself to look at roadside things, cottage gardens, old housewives in doorways, gaffer goodman meeting his crony on the path, groups of boys and girls. She would take the girls, Matthew Weyburn the boys. She had lessons to give to girls, she had sympathy, pity, anticipation. That would be a life of happy service. It might be a fruitful trial of the system he proposed, to keep the boys and girls in company as much as possible, both at lessons and at games. His was the larger view. Her lord's view appeared similar to that of her aunt's "throned Ottoman Turk on his divan." Matthew Weyburn believed in the bettering of the world; Lord Ormont had no belief like it.

Presently Mrs. Pagnell returned to the charge, and once more she was nipped, and irritated to declare she had never known her niece's temper so provoking.

Aminta was launching a dream of a lass she had seen in a field, near a white hawthorn, standing upright, her left arm aloft round the pole of a rake, the rim of her bonnet tipped on her forehead; an attitude of a rustic Britannia with helmet heeling at dignity. The girl's eyes hung to the passing chariot, without movement of her head. It was Aminta who looked back, and she saw the girl looking away. Among the superior dames and damsels she had seen, there was not one to match that figure for stately air, gallant ease, and splendour of pose. Matthew Weyburn would have admired the girl. Aminta did better than envy, she cast off the last vestiges of her bitter ambition to be a fine lady, and winged into the bosom of the girl, and not shyly said "yes" to Matthew Weyburn, and to herself, deep in herself: "A maid has no need to be shy." Hardly blushing, she walks on into the new life

beside him, and hears him say: "I in my way, you in yours; we are equals, the stronger for being equals," and she quite agrees, and she gives him the fuller heart for his not requiring her to be absorbed—she is the braver mate for him. Does not that read his meaning? Happiest of the girls of earth, she has divined it at once, from never having had the bitter ambition to be a slave, that she might wear rich tissues; and let herself be fettered, that she might loll in idleness; lose a soul to win a title; escape commonplace to discover it ghastlier under cloth of gold, and the animal crowned, adored, fattened, utterly served, in the class called by consent of human society the Upper.

Reason whispered a reminder of facts to her.

"But I am not the Countess of Ormont!" she said. She felt herself the girl, her sensations were so intensely simple.

Proceeding to an argument, that the earl did not regard her as the Countess of Ormont, or the ceremony at the British Embassy as one serious and binding, she pushed her reason too far: sweet delusion waned. She waited for some fresh scene to revive it.

Aminta sat unwittingly weaving her destiny.

While she was thus engaged, a carriage was rolling on the more westerly road down to Steignton. Seated in it were Lady Charlotte Eglett and Matthew Weyburn. They had met at Arthur Abner's office the previous day. She went there straight from Lord Ormont's house-agent and upholsterer, to have a queer bit of thunderous news confirmed, that her brother was down at Steignton, refurnishing the house, and not for letting. She was excited: she treated Arthur Abner's closed-volume reticence as a corroboration of the house-

agent's report, and hearing Weyburn speak of his anxiety to see the earl immediately, in order to get release from his duties, proposed a seat in her carriage; for down Steignton way she meant to go, if only as excuse for a view of the old place. She kept asking what Lord Ormont wanted down at Steignton refurnishing the house, and not to let it! Her evasions of answers that plain speculation would supply were quaint. "He hasn't my feeling for Steignton. He could let it—I couldn't. Sacrilege to me to have a tenant in my old home where I was born. He's furnishing to raise his rent. His country won't give him anything to do, so he turns miser. That's my brother Rowsley's way of taking on old age."

Her brother Rowsley might also be showing another sign of his calamitous condition. She said to Weyburn, in the carriage, that her brother Rowsley might

like having his hair clipped by the Philistine woman; which is one of the ways of strong men to confess themselves ageing. "Not," said she, with her usual keen justness, "not that I've a word against Delilah. I look upon her as a patriot; she dallied and she used the scissors on behalf of her people. She wasn't bound to Samson in honour,—liked a strong man, probably enough. She proved she liked her country better. The Jews wrote the story of it, so there she stands for posterity to pelt her, poor wretch."

"A tolerably good analogy for the story of men and women generally," said Weyburn.

"Ah, well, you've a right to talk; you don't run miauling about women. It's easy to be squashy on that subject. As for the Jews, I don't go by their history, but now they're down I don't side with the Philistines, or Christians. They're

good citizens, and they've got Samson in the brain, too. That comes of persecution, a hard education. They beat the world by counting in the head. That's because they've learnt the value of fractions. Napoleon knew it in war, when he looked to the boots and great-coats of his men; those were his fractions. Lord Ormont thinks he had too hard-and-fast a system for the battle-field."

"A greater strategist than tactician, my lady? It may be," said Weyburn, smiling at her skips.

"Massing his cannon to make a big hole for his cavalry, my brother says; and weeding his infantry for the Imperial Guard he postponed the moment to use."

"At Moskowa?"

"Waterloo. I believe Lord Ormont would—there! his country's lost him, and chose it. They'll have their day for repentance yet. What a rapture to have

a thousand horsemen following you! I suppose there never was a man worthy of the name who roared to be a woman. I know I could have shrieked half my life through to have been born male. It's no matter now. When we come to this hateful old age, we meet: no, we're no sex then—we're dry sticks. I'll tell you: my Olmer doctor—that's an impudent fellow who rode by staring into my carriage. The window's down. He could see without pushing his hat in."

Weyburn looked out after a man cantering on.

"A Mr. Morsfield," he said. "I thought it was he when I saw him go by. I've met him at the fencing-rooms. He's one of the violent fencers, good for making his point, if one funks an attack."

"That man Morsfield, is it? I wonder what he's doing on the road here. He goes over London boasting—hum, nothing

to me. But he'll find Lord Ormont's arm can protect a poor woman, whatever she is. He'd have had it before, only Lord Ormont shuns a scandal. I was telling you, my Olmer doctor forbade horse-riding, and my husband raised a noise like one of my turkey-cocks on the wing; so I've given up the saddle, to quiet him. I guessed. I went yesterday morning to my London physician. He sounded me, pushed out his mouth and pulled down his nose, recommended avoidance of excitement. 'Is it heart?' I said. He said it was heart. That was the best thing an old woman could hear. He said, when he saw I wasn't afraid, it was likely to be quick; no doctors, no nurses, and daily bulletins for inquirers, but just the whites of the eyes, the laying-out, the undertaker, and the family-vault. That's one reason why I want to see Steignton before the blow that may fall any day, whether my

brother Rowsley's there or no. But that Olmer doctor of mine, Causitt, Peter Causitt, shall pay me for being a liar or else an ignoramus when I told him he was to tell me bluntly the nature of my disease."

A horseman, in whom they recognized Mr. Morsfield, passed, clattering on the road behind them.

"Some woman hereabout," Lady Charlotte muttered.

Weyburn saw him joined by a cavalier, and the two consulted and pointed whips right and left.

CHAPTER IX.

LADY CHARLOTTE'S TRIUMPH.

ONE of the days of sovereign splendour in England was riding down the heavens, and drawing the royal mantle of the gold-fringed shadows over plain and wavy turf, blue water and woods of the country round Steignton. A white mansion shone to a length of oblong lake that held the sun-ball suffused in mild yellow.

"There's the place," Lady Charlotte said to Weyburn, as they had view of it at a turn of the park. She said to herself—where I was born and bred! and her sight gloated momentarily on the house and side avenues, a great plane standing to the right

of the house, the sparkle of a little river running near; all the scenes she knew, all young and lively. She sprang on her seat for a horse beneath her, and said, "But this is healthy excitement," as in reply to her London physician's remonstrances. "And there's my brother Rowsley, talking to one of the keepers," she cried. "You see Lord Ormont? I can see a mile. Sight doesn't fail with me. He's insisting. 'Ware poachers when Rowsley's on his ground! You smell the air here? Nobody dies round about Steignton. Their legs wear out and they lie down to rest them. It's the finest air in the world. Now look, the third window left of the porch, first floor. That was my room before I married. Strangers have been here, and called the place home. It can never be home to any but me and Rowsley. He sees the carriage. He little thinks! He's dressed in his white corduroy and knee-breeches. Age! he

won't know age till he's ninety. Here he comes marching. He can't bear surprises. I'll wave my hand and call."

She called his name.

In a few strides he was at the carriage window. "You, Charlotte?"

"Home again, Rowsley! Bring down your eyebrows, and let me hear you're glad I've come."

"What made you expect you would find me here?"

"Anything—cats on the tiles at night. You can't keep a secret from me. Here's Mr. Weyburn, good enough to be my escort. I'll get out."

She alighted, scorning help; Weyburn at her heels.

The earl nodded to him politely and not cordially. He was hardly cordial to Lady Charlotte.

That had no effect on her. "A glorious day for Steignton," she said. "Ah, there's

the Buridon group of beeches ; grander trees than grow at Buridon. Old timber now. I knew them slim as demoiselles. Where's the ash ? We had a splendid ash on the west side."

"Dead and cut down long since," replied the earl.

"So we go !"

She bent her steps to the spot ; a grass-covered heave of the soil.

"Dear old tree !" she said, in a music of elegy : and to Weyburn : "Looks like a stump of an arm lopped off a shoulder in bandages. Nature does it so. All the tenants doing well, Rowsley ?"

"About the same amount of trouble with them."

"Ours at Olmer get worse."

"It's a process for the extirpation of the landlords."

"Then down goes the country."

"They've got their case, their papers tell us."

"I know they have; but we've got the soil, and we'll make a fight of it."

"They can fight too, they say."

"I should be sorry to think they couldn't if they're Englishmen."

She spoke so like his old Charlotte of the younger days that her brother partly laughed.

"Parliamentary fighting's not much to your taste or mine. They've lost their stomach for any other. The battle they enjoy is the battle that goes for the majority. Gauge their valour by that."

"To be sure," said his responsive sister. She changed her note. "But what I say is, let the nobles keep together and stick to their class. There's nothing to fear then. They must marry among themselves, think of the blood; it's their first duty. Or better a peasant girl! Middle courses

dilute it to the stuff in a publican's tankard. It's an adulterous beast who thinks of mixing old wine with anything."

"Hulloa!" said the earl; and she drew up.

"You'll have me here till over to-morrow, Rowsley, so that I may have one clear day at Steignton?"

He bowed. "You will choose your room. Mr. Weyburn is welcome."

Weyburn stated the purport of his visit, and was allowed to name an early day for the end of his term of service.

Entering the house, Lady Charlotte glanced at the armour and stag-branches decorating corners of the hall, and straight-way laid her head forward, pushing after it in the direction of the drawing-room. She went in, stood for a minute, and came out. Her mouth was hard shut.

At dinner she had tales of uxorious men, of men who married mistresses, of the

fearful incubus the vulgar family of a woman of the inferior classes ever must be; and her animadversions were strong in the matter of gew-gaw modern furniture. The earl submitted to hear.

She was, however, keenly attentive whenever he proffered any item of information touching Steignton.

After dinner Weyburn strolled to the points of view she cited as excellent for different aspects of her old home.

He found her waiting to hear his laudation when he came back; and in the early morning she was on the terrace, impatient to lead him down to the lake. There, at the boat-house, she commanded him to loosen a skiff and give her a paddle. Between exclamations, designed to waken louder from him and not so successful as her cormorant hunger for praise of Steignton required, she plied him to confirm with his opinion an opinion that her

reasoning mind had almost formed in the close neighbourhood of the beloved and honoured person provoking it; for abstract ideas were unknown to her. She put it, however, as in the abstract:—

“How is it we meet people brave as lions before an enemy, and rank cowards where there’s a botheration among their friends at home? And tell me, too, if you’ve thought the thing over, what’s the meaning of this? I’ve met men in high places, and they’ve risen to distinction by their own efforts, and they head the nation. Right enough, you’d say. Well, I talk with them, and I find they’ve left their brains on the ladder that led them up; they’ve only the ideas of their grandfather on general subjects. I come across a common peasant or craftsman, and he down there has a mind more open—he’s wiser in his intelligence than his rulers and lawgivers up above him. He understands

what I say, and I learn from him. I don't learn much from our senators, or great lawyers, great doctors, professors, members of governing bodies—that lot. Policy seems to petrify their minds when they've got on an eminence. Now explain it, if you can."

"Responsibility has a certain effect on them, no doubt," said Weyburn. "Eminent station among men doesn't give a larger outlook. Most of them confine their observation to their supports. It happens to be one of the questions I have thought over. Here in England, and particularly on a fortnight's run in the lowlands of Scotland once, I have, like you, my lady, come now and then across the people we call common, men and women, old way-side men especially; slow-minded, but hard in their grasp of facts, and ready to learn, and logical, large in their ideas, though going a roundabout way to express

them. They were at the bottom of wisdom, for they had in their heads the delicate sense of justice, upon which wisdom is founded. That is what their rulers lack. Unless we have the sense of justice abroad like a common air, there's no peace, and no steady advance. But these humble people had it. They reasoned from it, and came to sound conclusions. I felt them to be my superiors. On the other hand, I have not felt the same with 'our senators, rulers, and lawgivers.' They are for the most part deficient in the liberal mind."

"Ha! good, so far. How do you account for it?" said Lady Charlotte.

"I read it in this way: that the world being such as it is at present, demanding and rewarding with honours and pay special services, the men called great, who have risen to distinction, are not men of brains, but the men of aptitudes. These men of

aptitudes have a poor conception of the facts of life to meet the necessities of modern expansion. They are serviceable in departments. They go as they are driven, or they resist. In either case, they explain how it is that we have a world moving so sluggishly. They are not the men of brains, the men of insight and outlook. Often enough they are foes of the men of brains."

"Aptitudes; yes, that flashes a light into me," said Lady Charlotte. "I see it better. It helps to some comprehension of their muddle. A man may be a first-rate soldier, doctor, banker—as we call the usurer now-a-days—or brewer, orator, anything that leads up to a figure-head, and prove a foolish fellow if you sound him. I've thought something like it, but wanted the world. They say themselves, 'Get to know, and you see with what little wisdom the world is governed!' You

explain how it is. I shall carry 'aptitudes' away."

She looked straight at Weyburn. "If I were a younger woman I could kiss you for it."

He bowed to her very gratefully.

"Remember, my lady, there's a good deal of the Reformer in that definition."

"I stick to my class. But they shall hear a true word when there's one abroad, I can tell them. That reminds me—you ought to have asked: let me tell you I'm friendly with the Rev. Mr. Hampton-Evey. We had a wrestle for half-an-hour, and I threw him and helped him up, and he apologized for tumbling, and I subscribed to one of his charities, and gave up about the pew, but had an excuse for not sitting under the sermon. A poor good creature. He's got the aptitudes for his office. He won't do much to save his Church. I knew another who had his aptitude for the

classics, and he has mounted. He was my tutor when I was a girl. He was fond of declaiming passages from Lucian and Longus and Ovid. One day he was at it with a piece out of Daphnis and Chloe, and I said, 'Now translate.' He fetched a gurgle to say he couldn't, and I slapped his cheek. Will you believe it? the man was indignant. I told him, if he would like to know why I behaved in 'that unmaidenly way,' he had better apply at home. I had no further intimations of his classical aptitudes; but he took me for a cleverer pupil than I was. I hadn't a notion of the stuff he recited. I read by his face. That was my aptitude—always has been. But think of the donkeys parents are when they let a man have a chance of pouring his barley-sugar and sulphur into the ears of a girl. Lots of girls have no latent heckles and prickles to match his villany.—There's my brother come back to breakfast from a round. You

and I'll have a drive before lunch, and a ride or a stroll in the afternoon. There's a lot to see. I mean you to get the whole place into your head. I've ordered the phaeton, and you shall take the whip, with me beside you. That's how my husband and I spent three-quarters of our honeymoon."

Each of the three breakfasted alone.

They met on the terrace. It was easily perceived that Lord Ormont stood expecting an assault at any instant; prepared also to encounter and do battle with his redoubtable sister. Only he wished to defer the engagement. And he was magnanimous: he was in the right, she in the wrong; he had no desire to grapple with her, fling and humiliate. The Sphinx of Mrs. Pagnell had been communing with himself unwontedly during the recent weeks.

What was the riddle of him? That, he

did not read. But, expecting an assault, and relieved by his sister Charlotte's departure with Weyburn, he went to the drawing-room, where he had seen her sniff her strong suspicions of a lady coming to throne it. Charlotte could believe that he flouted the world with a beautiful young woman on his arm ; she would not believe him capable of doing that in his family home and native county ; so, then, her shrewd wits had nothing or little to learn. But her vehement fighting against facts ; her obstinate aristocratic prejudices, which he shared ; her stinger of a tongue : these in ebullition formed a discomfoting prospect. The battle might as well be conducted through the post. Come, it must !

Even her writing of the pointed truths she would deliver was an unpleasant anticipation. His ears heated. Undoubtedly he could crush her. Yet, supposing her to speak to his ears, she would say : " You

married a young woman, and have been foiling and fooling her ever since, giving her half a title to the name of wife, and allowing her in consequence to be wholly disfigured before the world—your family naturally her chief enemies, who would otherwise (Charlotte would proclaim it) have been her friends. What ! your intention was (one could hear Charlotte's voice) to smack the world in the face, and you smacked your young wife's instead !”

His intention had been nothing of the sort. He had married, in a foreign city, a young woman who adored him, whose features, manners, and carriage of her person satisfied his exacting taste in the sex ; and he had intended to cast gossipy England over the rail and be a traveller for the remainder of his days. And at the first she had acquiesced, tacitly accepted it as part of the contract. He bore with the burden of an intolerable aunt of hers for her sake.

The two fell to work to conspire. Aminta "tired of travelling," Aminta must have a London house. She continually expressed a hope that "she might set her eyes on Steignton some early day." In fact, she as good as confessed her scheme to plot for the acknowledged position of Countess of Ormont in the English social world. That was a distinct breach of the contract.

As to the babble of the London world about a "very young wife," he scorned it completely, but it belonged to the calculation. "A very handsome young wife," would lay commands on a sexagenarian vigilance while adding to his physical glory. The latter he could forego among people he despised. It would, however, be an annoyance to stand constantly hand upon sword-hilt.

There was, besides, the conflict with his redoubtable sister. He had no dread of it, in contemplation of the necessity; he

could crush his Charlotte. The objection was, that his Aminta should be pressing him to do it.

Examine the situation at present. Aminta has all she needs—every luxury. Her title as Countess of Ormont is not denied. Her husband justly refuses to put foot into English society. She, choosing to go where she may be received, dissociates herself from him, and he does not complain. She does complain. There is a difference between the two.

He had always shunned the closer yoke with a woman because of these vexatious dissensions. For not only are women incapable of practising, they cannot comprehend magnanimity.

Lord Ormont's argumentative reverie to the above effect had been pursued over and over. He knew that the country which broke his military career and ridiculed his newspaper controversy was unforgiven

by him. He did not reflect on the consequences of such an unpardoning spirit in its operation on his mind.

If he could but have passed the injury, he would ultimately—for his claims of service were admitted—have had employment of some kind. Inoccupation was poison to him; travel juggled with his malady of restlessness; really, a compression of the warrior's natural forces. His Aminta, pushed to it by the woman Pagnell, declined to help him in softening the virulence of the disease. She would not travel; she would fix in this London of theirs, and scheme to be hailed the accepted Countess of Ormont. She manœuvred; she threw him on the veteran soldier's instinct, and it resulted spontaneously that he manœuvred.

Hence their game of Pull, which occupied him a little, tickled him and amused. The watching of her pretty infantile tactics

amused him too much to permit of a side-thought on the cruelty of the part he played. She had every luxury, more than her station by right of birth would have supplied.

But he was astonished to find that his Aminta proved herself clever, though she had now and then said something pointed. She was in awe of him; notwithstanding which, clearly she meant to win and pull him over. He did not dislike her for it; she might use her weapons to play her game; and that she should bewitch men—a man like Morsfield—was not wonderful. On the other hand, her conquest of Mrs. Lawrence Finchley scored tellingly: that was unaccountably queer. What did Mrs. Lawrence expect to gain? the sage lord asked. He had not known women devoid of a positive practical object of their own when they bestirred themselves to do a friendly deed.

Thanks to her conquest of Mrs. Lawrence, his Aminta was gaining ground—daily she made an advance; insomuch that he had heard of himself as harshly blamed in London for not having countenanced her recent and rather imprudent move. In other words, whenever she gave a violent tug at their game of Pull, he was expected to second it. But the world of these English is too monstrously stupid in what it expects, for any of its extravagances to be followed by interjections.

All the while he was trimming and rolling a field of armistice at Steignton, where they could discuss the terms he had a right to dictate, having yielded so far. Would she be satisfied with the rule of his ancestral hall, and the dispensing of hospitalities to the county? No, one may guess: no woman is ever satisfied. But she would have to relinquish her game, counting her good round half of the honours. Some-

what more, on the whole. Without beating, she certainly had accomplished the miracle of bending him. To time and a wife it is no disgrace for a man to bend. It is the form of submission of the bulrush to the wind, of courtesy in the cavalier to a lady.

“Oh, here you are, Rowsley,” Lady Charlotte exclaimed at the drawing-room door. “Well, and I don’t like those Louis Quinze cabinets; and that modern French mantelpiece clock is hideous. You seem to furnish in downright contempt of the women you invite to sit in the room. Lord help the wretched woman playing hostess in such a pinchbeck bric-à-brac shop, if there were one! She’s spared, at all events.”

He stepped at slow march to one of the five windows. Lady Charlotte went to another near by. She called to Weyburn—

“We had a regatta on that water when

Lord Ormont came of age. I took an oar in one of the boats, and we won a prize; and when I was landing I didn't stride enough to the spring-plank, and plumped in."

Some labourers of the estate passed in front.

Lord Ormont gave out a broken laugh. "See those fellows walk! That's the raw material of the famous English infantry. They bend their knees five-and-forty degrees for every stride; and when you drill them out of that, they're stiff as ramrods. I gymnasticized them in my regiment. I'd have challenged any French regiment to out-walk or out-jump us, or any crack Tyrolese Jägers to out-climb, though we were cavalry."

"Yes, my lord, and exercised crack corps are wanted with us," Weyburn replied. "The English authorities are adverse to it, but it's against nature—on the supposition

that all Englishmen might enrol untrained in Cæsar's pet legion. Virgil shows knowledge of men when he says of the row-boat straining in emulation, *Possunt quia posse videntur.*"

He talked on rapidly ; he wondered that he did not hear Lady Charlotte exclaim at what she must be seeing.

From the nearest avenue a lady had issued. She stood gazing at the house, erect—a gallant figure of a woman—one hand holding her parasol, the other at her hip. He knew her. She was a few paces ahead of Mrs. Pagnell, beside whom a gentleman walked.

The cry came : " It's that man Morsfield ! Who brings that man Morsfield here ? He hunted me on the road ; he seemed to be on the wrong scent. Who are those women ? Rowsley, are your grounds open every day of the week ? She threatens to come in ! "

Lady Charlotte had noted that the foremost and younger of "those women" understood how to walk and how to dress to her shape and colour. She inclined to think she was having to do with an intrepid foreign-bred minx.

Aminta had been addressed by one of her companions, and had hastened forward. It looked like the beginning of a run to enter the house.

Mrs. Pagnell ran after her. She ran cow-like.

The earl's gorge rose at the spectacle Charlotte was observing.

With Morsfield he could have settled accounts at any moment, despatching Aminta to her chamber for an hour. He had, though he was offended, an honourable guess that she had not of her free will travelled with the man and brought him into the grounds. It was the presence of the intolerable Pagnell under Charlotte's

eyes which irritated him beyond the common anger he felt at Aminta's pursuit of him right into Steignton. His mouth locked. Lady Charlotte needed no speech from him for sign of the boiling; she was too wary to speak while that went on.

He said to Weyburn, loud enough for his Charlotte to hear: "Do me the favour to go to the Countess of Ormont. Conduct her back to London. You will say it is my command. Inform Mr. Morsfield, with my compliments, I regret I have no weapons here. I understand him to complain of having to wait. I shall be in town three days from this date."

"My lord," said Weyburn; and actually he did mean to supplicate. He could imagine seeing Lord Ormont's eyebrows rising to alpine heights.

Lady Charlotte seized his arm.

"Go at once. Do as you are told. I'll have your portmanteau packed and sent after

you—the phaeton's out in the yard—to Rowsley, or Ahead, or Dornton, wherever they put up. Now go, or we shall have hot work. Keep your head on, and go.”

He went, without bowing.

Lady Charlotte rang for the footman.

The earl and she watched the scene on the sward below the terrace.

Aminta listened to Weyburn. Evidently there was no expostulation.

But it was otherwise with Mrs. Pagnell. She flung wild arms of a semaphore signalling national events. She sprang before Aminta to stop her retreat, and stamped and gibbed, for sign that she would not be driven. She fell away to Mr. Morsfield, for simple hearing of her plaint. He appeared emphatic. There was a passage between him and Weyburn.

“I suspect you've more than your match in young Weyburn, Mr. Morsfield,” Lady

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Charlotte said, measuring them as they stood together.

They turned at last.

“You shall drive back to town with me, Rowsley,” said the fighting dame.

She breathed no hint of her triumph.

CHAPTER X.

A SCENE ON THE ROAD BACK.

AFTER refusing to quit the grounds of Steignton, in spite of the proprietor, Mrs. Pagnell burst into an agitation to have them be at speed, that they might "shake the dust of the place from the soles of their feet"; and she hurried past Aminta and Lord Ormont's insolent emissary, carrying Mr. Morsfield beside her, perforce of a series of imperiously-toned vacuous questions, to which he listened in rigid politeness, with the ejaculation steaming off from time to time, "A scandal!"

He shot glances behind.

Mrs. Pagnell was going too fast. She,

however, would not hear of a halt, and she was his main apology for being present ; he was excruciatingly attached to the horrid woman.

Weyburn spoke the commonplaces about regrets to Aminta.

“ Believe me, it is long since I have been so happy,” she said.

She had come out of her stupefaction, and she wore no theatrical looks of cheerfulness.

“ I regret that you should be dragged away. But, if you say you do not mind, it will be pleasant to me. I can excuse Lord Ormont’s anger. I was ignorant of his presence here. I thought him in Paris. I supposed the place empty. I wished to see it once. I travelled as the niece of Mrs. Pagnell. She is a little infatuated. . . . Mr. Morsfield heard of our expedition through her. I changed the route. I was not in want of a defender. I could have defended myself in case of need. We

slept at Ashead, two hours from Steignton. He and a friend accompanied us, not with my consent. Lord Ormont could not have been aware of that. These accidental circumstances happen. There may be pardonable intentions on all sides."

She smiled. Her looks were open, and her voice light and spirited; though the natural dark rose-glow was absent from her olive cheeks.

Weyburn puzzled over the mystery of so volatile a treatment of a serious matter, on the part of a woman whose feelings he had reason to know were quick and deep. She might be acting, as women so cleverly do.

It could hardly be acting when she pointed to peeps of scenery, with a just eye for landscape.

"You leave us for Switzerland very soon?" she said.

"The Reversion I have been expecting has fallen in, besides my inheritance. My

mother was not to see the school. But I shall not forget her counsels. I can now make my purchase of the house and buildings, and buy out my partner at the end of a year. My boys are jumping to start. I had last week a letter from Émile."

"Dear little Émile!"

"You like him?"

"I could use a warmer word. He knew me when I was a girl."

She wound the strings of his heart suddenly tense, and they sang to their quivering.

"You will let me hear of you, Mr. Weyburn?"

"I will write. Oh! certainly I will write, if I am told you are interested in our doings, Lady Ormont."

"I will let you know that I am."

"I shall be happy in writing full reports."

"Every detail, I beg. All concerning the school. Help me to feel I am a boarder."

I catch up an old sympathy I had for girls and boys. For boys! any boys! the dear monkey boys! cherub monkeys! They are so funny. I am sure I never have laughed as I did at Selina Collett's report, through her brother, of the way the boys tried to take to my name; and their sneezing at it, like a cat at a deceitful dish. 'Aminta'—was that their way?"

"Something—the young rascals!"

"But please repeat it as you heard them."

"'Aminta.'"

He subdued the mouthing.

"It didn't offend me at all. It is one of my amusements to think of it. But after a time they liked the name; and then how did they say it?"

He had the beloved Aminta on his lips.

He checked it, or the power to speak it failed.

“Lady Ormont, pardon me.”

She drew in a sharp breath.

“Oh, do not ask ! I hope your boys will have plenty of fun in them. They will have you for a providence and a friend. I should wish to propose to visit your school some day. You will keep me informed whether the school has vacancies. You will, please, keep me regularly informed ?”

She broke into sobs.

Weyburn talked on of the school, for a cover to the resuming of her fallen mask, as he fancied it.

She soon recovered, all save a steady voice for converse, and begged him to proceed, and spoke in the flow of the subject ; but the quaver of her tones was a cause of further melting. The tears poured, she could not explain why, beyond assuring him that they were no sign of unhappiness. Winds on the great waters against a strong

tidal current beat up the wave and shear and wing the spray, as in Aminta's bosom. Only she could know that it was not her heart weeping, though she had grounds for a woman's weeping. But she alone could be aware of her heart's running counter to the tears.

Her agitation was untimely. Both Mrs. Pagnell and Mr. Morsfield observed emotion at work. And who could wonder? A wife denied the admittance to her husband's house by her husband! The most beautiful woman of her time relentlessly humiliated, ordered to journey back the way she had come!

They had reached the gate of the park, and had turned.

"A scandal!"

Mr. Morsfield renewed his interjection vehemently, for an apology to his politeness in breaking from Mrs. Pagnell.

Joining the lady, whose tears were of the

nerves, he made offer of his devotion in any shape; and she was again in the plight to which a desperado can push a woman of the gentle kind. She had the fear of provoking a collision if she reminded him that, despite her entreaties, he had compelled her, seconded by her aunt as he had been, to submit to his absurd protection on the walk across the park.

He seemed quite regardless of the mischief he had created; and, reflecting upon how it served his purpose, he might well be. Intemperate lover, of the ancient pattern, that he was, his aim to win the woman acknowledged no obstacle in the means. Her pitiable position appealed to the best of him; his inordinate desire of her aroused the worst. It was, besides, an element of his coxcombry, that he should, in apeing the utterly inconsiderate, rush swiftly to impersonate it when his passions were cast on a die.

Weyburn he ignored as a stranger, an intruder, an inferior.

Aminta's chariot was at the gate.

She had to resign herself to the chances of a clash of men, and, as there were two to one, she requested help of Weyburn's hand, that he might be near her.

A mounted gentleman, smelling parasite in his bearing, held the bridle of Morsfield's horse.

The ladies having entered the chariot, Morsfield sprang to the saddle, and said : " You, sir, had better stretch your legs to the inn."

" There is room for you, Mr. Weyburn," said Aminta.

Mrs. Pagnell puffed.

" I can't think we've room, my dear. I want that bit of seat in front for my feet."

Morsfield kicked at his horse's flanks, and between Weyburn and the chariot step, cried : " Back, sir !"

His reins were seized, the horse reared, the unexpected occurred.

Weyburn shouted "Off!" to the postillion, and jumped in.

Morsfield was left to the shaking of a dusty coat, while the chariot rolled its gentle course down the leafy lane into the high-road.

His friend had seized the horse's bridle-reins; and he remarked: "I say, Dolf, we don't prosper to-day."

"He pays for it," said Morsfield, foot in stirrup. "You'll take him and trounce him at the inn. I don't fight with servants. Better game. One thing, Cumnock: the fellow's clever at the foils."

"Foins to the devil! If I tackle the fellow, it won't be with the buttons. But how has he pushed in?"

Morsfield reported "the scandal" in sharp headings.

"Turned her away. Won't have her

enter his house—grandest woman in all England! Sent his dog to guard. Think of it for an insult. It's insult upon insult. I've done my utmost to fire his marrow. I did myself a good turn by following her up and entering that park with her. I shall succeed; there's a look of it. All I have—my life—is that woman's. I never knew what this devil's torture was before I saw her."

His friend was concerned for his veracity.

"Amy!"

"A common spotted snake. She caught me young, and she didn't carry me off, as I mean to carry off this glory of her sex—she is: you've seen her!—and free her, and devote every minute of the rest of my days to her. I say I must win the woman if I stop at nothing, or I perish; and, if it's a failure, exit's my road. I've watched every atom she touched in a room, and would have heaped gold to have the chairs,

tables, cups, carpets, mine. I have two short letters written with her hand. I'd give two of my estates for two more. If I were a beggar, and kept them, I should be rich. Relieve me of that dog, and I toss you a thousand-pound note, and thank you from my soul, Cumnock. You know what hangs on it. Spur, you dolt, or she'll be out of sight."

They cantered upon application of the spur. Captain Cumnock was an impecunious fearless rascal, therefore a parasite and a bully duellist; a thick-built north-countryman; a burly ape of the ultra-elegant; hunter, gamester, hard-drinker, man of pleasure. His known readiness to fight was his trump-card at a period when the declining custom of the duel taxed men's courage to brave the law and the Puritan in the interests of a privileged and menaced aristocracy. An incident like the present was the passion in the dice-box to

Cumnock. Morsfield was of the order of men who can be generous up to the pitch of their desires. Consequently, the world accounted him open-handed and devoted when enamoured. Few men liked him ; he was a hero with some women. The women he trampled on ; the men he despised. To the lady of his choice he sincerely offered his fortune and his life for the enjoyment of her favour. His ostentation and his offensive daring combined the characteristics of the peacock and the hawk. Always near upon madness, there were occasions when he could eclipse the insane. He had a ringing renown in his class.

Chariot and horsemen arrived at the Roebuck Arms, at the centre of the small town of Ashead, on the line from Steignton through Rowsley. The pair of cavaliers dismounted and hustled Weyburn in assisting the ladies to descend.

The ladies entered the inn ; they declined

refection of any sort. They had biscuits and sweetmeats, and looked forward to tea at a farther stage. Captain Cumnock stooped to their verdict on themselves, with marvel at the quantity of flesh they managed to put on their bones from such dieting.

“By your courtesy, sir, a word with you in the inn-yard, if you please,” he said to Weyburn in the inn-porch.

Weyburn answered, “Half-a-minute,” and was informed that it was exactly the amount of time the captain could afford to wait.

Weyburn had seen the Steignton phaeton and coachman in the earl’s light-blue livery. It was at his orders, he heard. He told the coachman to expect him shortly, and he followed the captain, with a heavy trifle of suspicion that some brew was at work. He said to Aminta in the passage—

“You have your settlement with the

innkeeper. Don't, I beg, step into the chariot till you see me."

"Anything?" said she.

"Only prudence."

"Our posting horses will be harnessed soon, I hope. I burn to get away."

Mrs. Pagnell paid the bill at the bar of the inn. Morsfield poured out for the injured countess or no-countess a dram of the brandy of passion, under the breath.

"Deny that you singled me once for your esteem. Hardest-hearted of the women of earth and dearest! deny that you gave me reason to hope—and now! I have ridden in your track all this way for the sight of you, as you know, and you kill me with frost. Yes, I rejoice that we were seen together. Look on me. I swear I perish for one look of kindness. You have been shamefully used, madam."

"It seems to me I am being so," said

Aminta, cutting herself loose from the man of the close eyes that wavered as they shot the dart.

Her action was too decided for him to follow her up under the observation of the inn windows and a staring street.

Mrs. Pagnell came out. She went boldly to Morsfield, and they conferred. He was led by her to the chariot, where she pointed to a small padded slab of a seat back to the horses. Turning to the bar, he said: "My friend will look to my horse. Both want watering and a bucketful. There!"—he threw silver—"I have to protect the ladies."

Aminta was at the chariot door talking to her aunt inside.

"But I say I have been insulted—is the word—more than enough by Lord Ormont to-day!" Mrs. Pagnell exclaimed; "and I won't, I positively refuse to ride up to London with any servant of his. It's quite

sufficient that it's his servant. I'm not titled, but I'm not quite dirt. Mr. Morsfield kindly offers his protection, and I accept. He is company."

Nodding and smirking at Morsfield's approach, she entreated Aminta to step up and in, for the horses were coming out of the yard.

Aminta looked round. Weyburn was perceived ; and Morsfield's features cramped at thought of a hitch in the plot.

"Possession," Mrs. Pagnell murmured significantly. She patted the seat. Morsfield sprang to Weyburn's place.

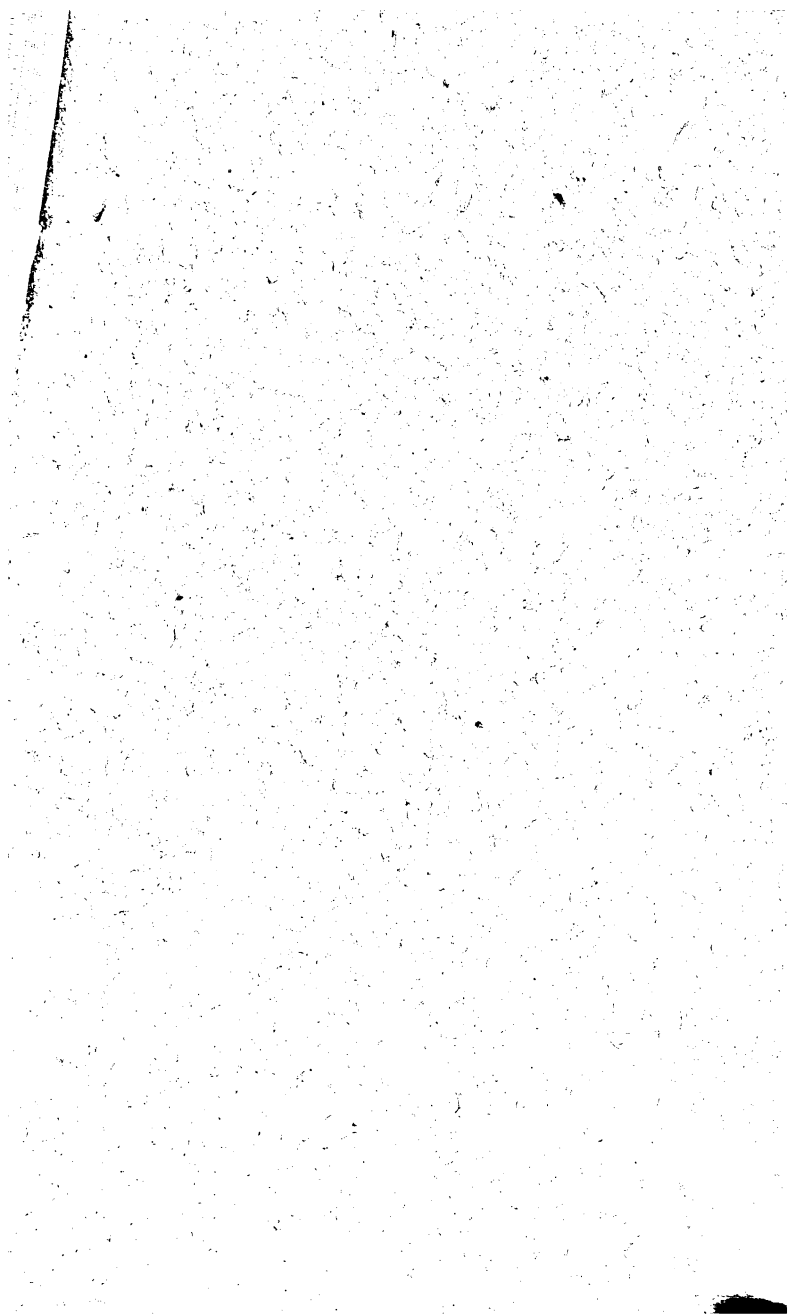
That was witnessed by Aminta and Weyburn. She stepped to consult him. He said to the earl's coachman—a young fellow with a bright eye for orders—

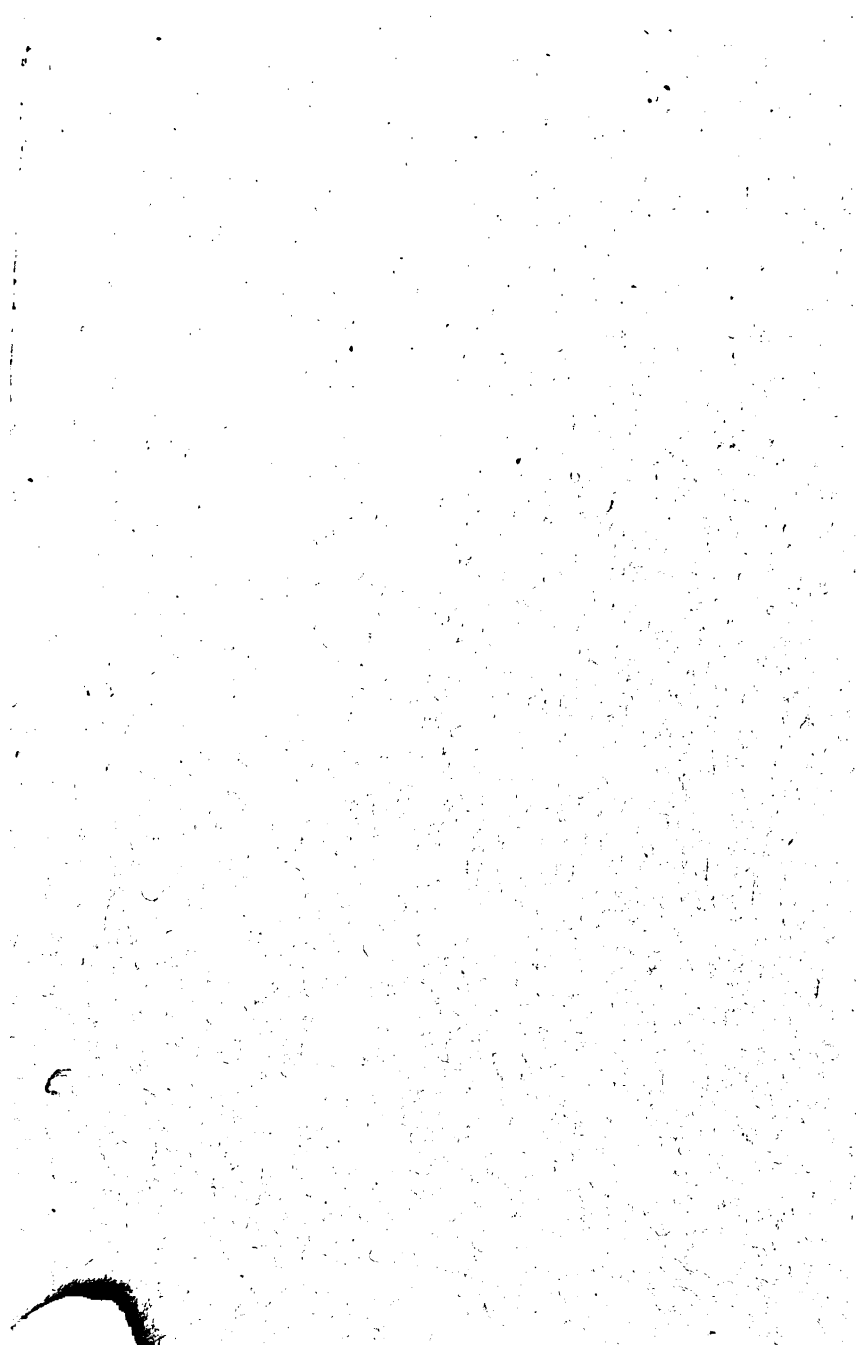
"Drive as fast as you can pelt to Dornton. I'm doing my lord's commands. Trust yourself to me, madam."

His hand stretched for Aminta to mount.

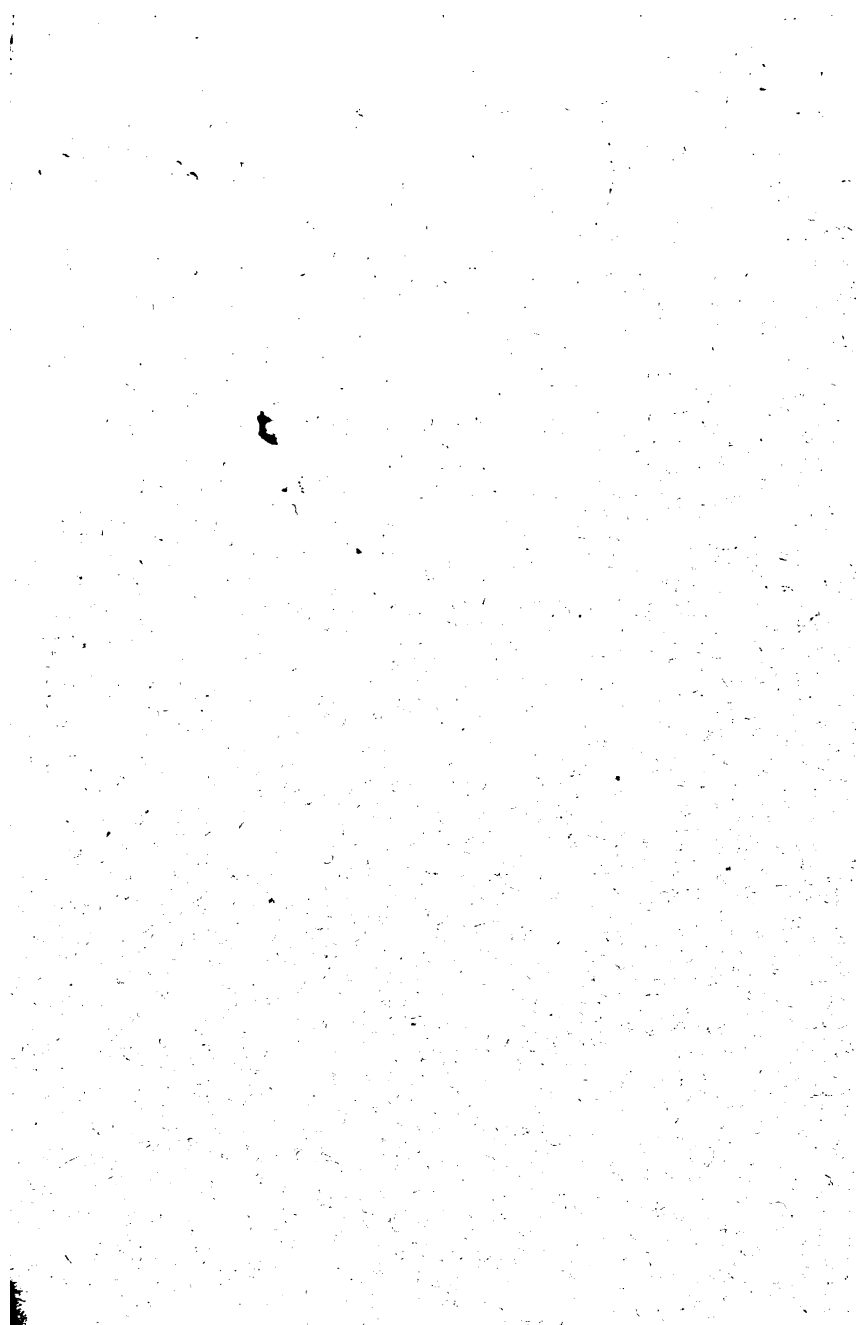
She took it without a word and climbed to the seat. A clatter of hoofs rang out with the crack of the whip. They were away behind a pair of steppers that could go the pace.

END OF VOL. II.









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